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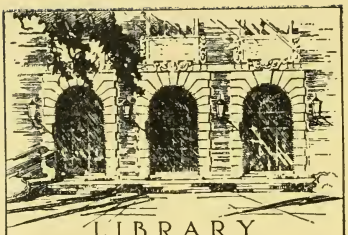

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IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.

London

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# 'LET NOTHING YOU DISMAY'

(*continued*).

## CHAPTER II.

### THE ASTONISHMENT OF MATHEW HUMBLE.

By this time the people had dispersed quadrivious —that is to say, north, south, east, and west; and were making their way homewards, their appetites for dinner keener than usual. Penance, considered as a Sunday show, hath no fellow; it is even superior to the stocks, which is a week-day show. You may not pelt a man in a white sheet with rotten eggs, it is true; but the same objection applies to the stocks. Of course, it cannot compare with a good pillory, which is rare, especially when eggs are plentiful and rotten apples lying under every tree; or with a really heartfelt whipping of a vagabond or gipsy at the cart-tail, which is, unfortunately, rarer still. Among simple people there is a feeling that the greater the pain endured by the subject, the greater is the pleasure of the onlooker. Just in the same way did the Roman ladies discuss among themselves before the play whether it was more desirable to see Hercules —represented by the young Herr Hermann newly

arrived from the Rhine—burning to death in a shirt of pitch; or Scævola—done to the life by that gallant captive, Owen ap Rice, from Britain—thrusting his bare arm into a clear fire and keeping it there till the hand was burnt off; or Actæon—played with spirit by Joseph Ben Eleazar, the swift-footed Syrian—pursued and torn to pieces by the hounds of Dian.

Ralph walked quickly past some of these groups, who fell back to right and left, and looked at him curiously. On ordinary Sundays he would have a pleasant word with all, a kiss for the children, and a challenge for the boys. To-day he passed them without a word, with head erect, eyes flashing, and clenched fist. He was not thinking of salutations; he was thinking what he should do: how he should begin his mutiny: what would be the issue of the fight. Whatever the result, there would be joy in bringing, if only for once, hand, fist, or stick into contact with the face or figure of his cousin. It was he, was it, who informed against him to his Worship? It was no other than his cousin who had compassed this most disagreeable of mornings. And now, doubtless, he waited, with a great cane, his arrival at home, in order to administer another of those 'corrections' of which he was so fond. Hitherto, Ralph had submitted quietly; but he had been growing; he was within a month of seventeen;

was it to be endured that he should be beaten and flogged like a child of ten, because his cousin hated him?

The girls, as he strode past them regardless, looked at him with great pity, because they knew —everybody knew—what awaited him. And Mathew Humble such a hard man! Poor lad! Yet those who mock spirits and fairies never fail to have cause for repentance in the long run; and punishment had fallen swiftly upon Ralph. Perhaps, after this, he would respect the things which belong to the other world.

Heavens! one might as well sit among the ruins of Dunstanburgh after dark and pretend to be the Seeker; or within the chapel of Dilston at midnight and pretend to be Lady Derwentwater's troubled spirit; and then hope to escape scot-free. Yet, poor lad! and Mathew so hard a man!

What Ralph said to himself—justifying rebellion, because he was a conscientious lad—was this: 'His Worship said that the penance would be enough; who was Mathew, then, to override the decision of the court?' Also, he was past the age of flogging, being now able to hold his own against most—whether at quarterstaff, singlestick, or wrestling—young men older than himself; lastly, since Mathew had played this trick, he wanted revenge. But Mathew was his guardian; very well, then let him learn —— But here he

broke down, because he could not, for the moment, think of any lesson which his own rebellion would be likely to teach his cousin.

When Ralph left the fields and turned into the lane leading down to the river, he began to look about among the trees and underwood as if searching for something. Presently he espied a long pliant alder-branch in its second year of growth which seemed promising. He cut it to a length of about three feet, trimmed off leaves and twigs, and balanced it critically with a tentative flourish or two in the air.

'As thick as my thumb,' he said, 'and as heavy as his cane. Blow for blow, cousin Mathew. This will curl round his shoulders and leave its marks upon his legs.'

Morwick Mill stands upon the River Coquet, about two miles from Warkworth. You can easily get to it by following the banks of the river, which is perhaps the best way, though sometimes you must off shoes and stockings, and wade across knee-deep to the other side.

The mill consists of a square house upon the edge of the river, with a great wheel on one side; and almost all the water of the river is here diverted so as to form a sufficient power for the mill-wheel. At the back of the mill, which is also a substantial dwelling-house, is a great careless garden, with pigsties and linneys for cattle, and

vegetables, and fruit-trees; and at the side are two or three cottages, where live the people employed at the mill. All the fields which lie sloping up from the river-side belong, as well, to the owner of the mill. The owner at this moment was no other than the scapegrace Ralph; and his cousin, Mathew Humble, was his guardian, who had nothing at all in the world of his own but a little farm of thirty acres. The thought of this great inheritance, compared with his own meagre holding, filled the good guardian's heart with bitterness, and his arm, when it came to correction, with a superhuman strength. He would be guardian for four years more; then he would have to give a strict account of his guardianship; and the burden of this obligation, though he had only held the post for two years, filled him with such wrath and anxiety that he was fain, when he did think upon it, which was often, to pull the cork out of a certain stone jar and allay his anxieties with a dram of strong waters. He was very anxious, because already the accounts were confused; the stone jar was always handy; therefore, he had become swollen about the neck and coarse of nose, which was a full and prominent feature, and flabby, as well as fiery, about the cheeks. In these times of much drinking many men become pendulous of cheek and ruddy of nose at forty or so, but few at six-and-twenty. Mathew was not,

at this time, much more than six-and-twenty ; say ten years older than Ralph.

The kitchen, dining-room, and sitting-room of Morwick Mill was a large low room, with one long window. At the sides of the room, and between the great joists, were hanging sides of bacon and hams, besides pewter-pots and pewter-dishes, brightly polished wooden platters, china cups, brass vessels, whips, bridles, a loaded blunderbuss, cudgels, strings of onions, dried herbs of every kind, and all the thousand things wanted for the conduct of a household. At one end was a noble fire of logs burning in an ample chimney, and before the fire a great piece of beef roasting, and now, to outward scrutiny and the sense of smell, ready to be dished. A middle-aged woman, full, comely, and good-natured of aspect, was engaged in preparation for that critical operation. This was Prudence, who had lived at the mill all her life.

She looked up as Ralph appeared in the doorway, and shook her head, but more in pity than in reproach. And she looked sideways, by way of friendly warning, in the direction of the table, at which sat another woman of different appearance. She was, perhaps, five or six and thirty, with thin features and sour expression, not improved by a cast in her eye. This was Barbara, sister of Mathew Humble, and now acting in

the capacity of mistress of Morwick Mill, for her brother was not married. She had open before her the Bible, and she had found a most beautiful collection of texts appropriate to the case of Fools in the Book of Proverbs. The table was laid for dinner, with pewter plates and black-handled knives and steel forks. The beer had been drawn, and stood in a great brown jug, foaming with a venerably silver head. Ralph observed without astonishment that the plate set for him contained a piece of dry bread, ostentatiously displayed. It was to be his dinner.

This pleasing maiden, Barbara, who regarded the boy with an affection almost as great as her brother's, that is to say, with a malignity quite uncommon, first pointed with her lean and skinny forefinger to the page before her, and read aloud, shaking her head reproachfully:

'"As a man who casteth firebrands, arrows, and death, so is the man that deceiveth his neighbour, and saith, Am I not in sport?"'

Solomon must surely have had Ralph in his mind.

Then she pointed with the same finger to a door opposite, and said, a smile of satisfaction stealing over her countenance:

'Go to your guardian. Go to receive the wages of sin.'

'Those,' said Ralph, with a little laugh, feeling

confidence in his alder-branch, 'are not a flogging, on this occasion, but a fight.'

Before she heard his words, or had begun to ask herself what they might mean, because she was so full of satisfaction with her texts, he had flung his hat upon a chair, and gone to the next room. If Barbara had been observant, she might have remarked, besides these extraordinary words, a certain brightness of the eyes and setting of the mouth which betokened the spirit of resistance.

The inner room was one occupied and used by Mathew alone. It contained all the papers, account-books, and documents connected with the property and business of the mill. Here, too, was the stone jar already referred to. The decks had been, so to speak, cleared for action, that is to say, the table was thrust into the corner, and upon it lay the sacred instrument with which Mathew loved to correct his ward. This promoter of virtue, or dispenser of consequences, was a strong and supple cane, than which few instruments are more highly gifted with the power of inflicting torture. Ralph knew it well, and had experienced on many occasions the full force of this wholesome quality. He saw it lying ready for use, and he reflected cheerfully that the alder-branch, partly up his left sleeve and partly in his coat-pocket, would be more supple, equally heavy,

and perhaps more efficacious regarded simply as a pain producer.

When the boy appeared, Mathew rose and removed his wig and coat, because the work before him was likely to make him warm. He then assumed the rod, and ordered Ralph to take off his coat and waistcoat.

'This day,' he said, 'you have disgraced your family. I design that you shall have such a flogging as you will not readily forget.' He then remembered that he would be more free for action without his waistcoat. A man can throw more heart into his work. 'Such a flogging,' he repeated as he removed it, 'as you will remember all your life.'

'Well, cousin,' said Ralph, 'Mr. Carnaby said that the penance was the punishment. I have done the penance.'

'Silence, sir! Do you dare to argue with your guardian?' He now began to roll up his shirt-sleeves so as to have his arms quite bare, which is an additional advantage when one wants to put out all one's strength. 'I shall flog the flesh off your bones, you young villain!'

But he paused, and for a moment his jaws stuck, and he was speechless, for his cousin, instead of meekly placing himself in position to receive the stupendous flogging intended for him,

was facing him, resolution in his eyes, and a weapon in his hands.

'Flogging for flogging, Cousin Mathew,' said Ralph; 'flesh for flesh. Strip my bones, I strip yours.'

Mathew now observed for the first time—it was a most unfortunate moment for making the discovery—that Ralph was a good two inches taller than himself, that his arm was as stout, and that his weapon was of a thickness, length, and pliability which might make the stoutest quail; also he remarked that his shoulders were surprisingly broad, and his legs of length and size quite out of the common. And it even occurred to him that he might have to endure hardness.

'Flesh for flesh,' said Ralph, poising the alder-branch.

'Villain! Would you break the Fifth Commandment?'

Ralph shook his weapon, making it sing merrily and even thirstily through the air, but made no reply.

'Lay down the switch.'

Ralph raised it above his head as one who is preparing to strike.

'Down on your knees, viper, and beg for pardon.'

'Flesh for flesh, Mathew,' said Ralph.

'You will have it then, young devil. I will kill you!'

Mathew rushed upon his cousin, raining blows as thick as hail upon him. For the moment his weight told and the boy was beaten back. Swish. 'Viper!' Swish—swish—'twas a terrible cane. 'I will teach you to rebel.' Swish—swish—'twas a cane of a suppleness beyond nature. 'I will give you a lesson.' Swish—swish. 'I will break every bone in your body.' Swish—the end of the cane found out every soft place—there were not many—upon Ralph's body.

But then the tables were turned, for the boy, recovering from the first confusion, leaped suddenly aside, and with a dexterous movement of the left foot caused his cousin to stumble and fall heavily. He struggled, struck, kicked, and lashed out—but he did not get up again. A very important element in the fight was strangely overlooked by Mathew before he began to attack. It was this, that whereas he was himself out of condition, the boy was in splendid fettle, sound of wind as well as limb. So furious was Mathew's first assault that, brief as was its duration, no sooner was he tripped up than he perceived that his wind was gone, and though he could kick and struggle, yet if he half got up he was quickly knocked down again. And while he kicked and struggled, this young viper, this monster of ingratitude, was

administering such a punishment as even he, Mathew, had never contemplated for Ralph.

'Have you had enough?' cried the boy at last, out of breath.

'I will murder you, I will—— Oh, Lord!' For the punishment began again.

'Stripping of flesh,' said Ralph. 'This you will remember, cousin, all your life.'

The alder-branch was like a flail in the lad's strong arm. The rapidity, the precision, the delicate perception of tender places, took away the sufferer's breath. There was no sound place left in the whole of Mathew's body.

'Have you had enough?' cried Ralph.

'I will flay you alive for this—I will. Oh, oh! I have had enough.'

'Then,' said Ralph, with one final effort, the effect of which would be, by itself, felt for a week and more, 'get up.'

Mathew rose, groaning.

'We have had the last of punishments,' said the boy. 'I will fight you any day you please, but I will take no more punishments from you.' He threw down his stick, and put on his coat and waistcoat, with some tenderness, however, for the first part of the battle had left its marks.

Now outside, the two women were listening, one with complacency, and the other with pity.

And the first was ready with the Bible still open at the Book of Proverbs, which contains quite an armoury of texts good to hurl at a young transgressor. The second, with one ear turned to the door of Mathew's room, went on dishing the beef, which she presently placed upon the table.

There was unusual delay in the sound which generally followed Ralph's visits to that room. No doubt Mathew was commencing with a short Commination Service. Presently, however, there was a great trampling of feet, with the swish, swish of the cane—Mathew's first charge.

'Lord ha' mercy!' cried Prudence.

'"The rod and reproof give wisdom,"' read her mistress from the Book.

Then they heard a heavy fall, followed by a heavier, faster, more determined swishing, hissing, and whistling of the instrument, till the air was resonant with its music, and it was as if all the boys in Northumberland were being caned at once.

'Lord ha' mercy!' repeated Prudence. 'He'll murder the boy.'

'"A reproof,"' read the other from her place, '"entereth more into a wise man than a hundred stripes into a fool."'

There was a pause, and then a sound of voices, and then another terrific hailstorm of blows.

Both women looked aghast. Was the punishment never to end?

Then Prudence rushed to the door.

'Mistress,' she cried, 'you may look on while the boy is cut to pieces—I can't and won't.'

She opened the door. Heavens! what a sight was that which met her astonished eyes. The boy, cut and bruised about the face, was standing in the middle of the room, smiling. The man was on his hands and knees, slowly rising; his shirt was torn off his back: his shoulders were cut to pieces; he was covered with weals and bruises; his face, scarred and seamed with Ralph's cruel alder-branch, was dreadful to look upon. He seemed to see nothing; he groaned as he lifted himself up; he staggered where he stood.

Presently he put on his coat with many groans and muttered curses, and Prudence observed that all the while he regarded the lad with looks of the most extreme terror and rage. Presently she began to understand the situation.

'Are you hurt, Master Ralph?' she asked.

'No; but Mathew is,' said Ralph.

'Mathew,' cried his sister, as the victim of the rebellion staggered into the room, 'what is this?'

He sank into his armchair with a long deep groan, and made no reply.

'Why, what in the world, Master Ralph?' asked the servant.

But the lad had gone. He went upstairs to his own room; made up a little bundle of things

which he wrapped in a handkerchief, picked out the thickest and heaviest of his cudgels, and then returned to the kitchen.

'Give me my dinner,' he said.

Barbara had brought out her brother's wig and put it on now, but he still sat silent and motionless. He was in such an agony of pain all over, and his nervous system had sustained so terrible a shock that he could not speak.

'Give me my dinner,' Ralph repeated.

Barbara pointed to the crust of bread. She was appalled by this mutiny, but she preserved some presence of mind, and she remembered the bread. Then she sat down again before the Bible and began to read, like a clergyman while the plate goes round.

'"It is as sport to the Fool to do mischief."'

Prudence, the beef being already served, laid a knife and fork for each.

'"A Fool's mouth,"' Barbara said, as if she was quoting Solomon, '"calleth for roasted beef and a stalled ox. Bread and water until submission and repentance."'

The young mutineer made no verbal reply. But he dragged the dish before his own plate, and began to carve for himself, largely and generously.

'Mathew!' cried Barbara, springing to her feet.

'Let be—let be,' said Mathew; 'let the young devil alone. I will be even with him somehow. Let be.'

'Not the old way, cousin,' replied Ralph with a nod. He then helped himself to about a pint or so of the good old October, and began, his appetite sharpened by exercise, to make the beef disappear in large quantities. Mathew looked on, saying nothing. The silence terrified his sister. What did it mean? And she perceived, for the first time, that their ward had ceased to be a boy and must henceforth be treated as a man. It was a fearful thought. She shut her Bible and sat back with folded hands, waiting the issue.

In course of time even a hungry boy of seventeen has had enough. Ralph lifted his head at last, took another prolonged pull at the beer, and told Barbara, politely, that he had enjoyed a good dinner.

Then he turned to his cousin and addressed him with a certain solemnity.

'Cousin,' he said, 'you have always hated me, because my uncle left the mill to me instead of to yourself. Yet you knew from the beginning that his design was for me to have it. I have done you no wrong. You have never lost any opportunity of abusing me before my face and behind my back. You became, unhappily for me, my guardian. You have never neglected any

chance of flogging and beating me, if you could find a cause. As regards the ghost business, I was wrong. I deserved punishment, but was it the province of a cousin and a guardian to go and lay information before the Justice of the Peace? I shall be seventeen come next month. In four years this mill and the farm will be my own. But if I remain with you here I can expect nothing but hatred and ill-treatment as far as you dare. You have given me ploughboy's work without a ploughboy's wage, and often without a ploughboy's food. As for flogging, that is finished, because I think you have no more stomach for another fight.'

Mathew made no reply whatever, but sat with his head upon his hands, breathing heavily.

'I am tired of ill-treatment,' Ralph went on, 'and I shall go away.'

'Whither, boy?' asked Barbara.

'I know not yet. I go to seek my fortune.'

'Go, if you will,' said Mathew; 'go, in the devil's name; go, whither you are bound to go: long before four years are over you will be hanging in chains.'

Ralph laughed and took up his bundle.

'Farewell, Prudence,' he said; 'thou wast ever kind to me.'

The woman threw her arms about his neck

and kissed him with tears, and prayed that the Lord might bless him. And, as he walked forth from the house, the voice of Barbara followed him, saying:

'"A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass, and a rod for the Fool's back."'

The Fugleman was sitting in the sun before his door in the castle, smoking a pipe and inclined to be drowsy, when Ralph appeared with his startling news.

As regards the flogging, the old soldier made light of it. Nothing can be done in the army without the cat. Had not he himself once received three hundred all by a mistake, because they were meant for another man, who escaped. Did he, therefore, bear malice against his commanding officer? No. But the villainy of Mathew, first to lay information and then to make an excuse for a flogging just for pleasure, and to gratify his own selfish desire to be continually flogging, why, that justified the mutiny. As for the details of the fight, he blamed severely the inexperience in strategy shown by first knocking down the enemy. He should have expected better things of Ralph, whose true policy would have been to harass and annoy his adversary by feints, dodges, and unexpected skirmishes. This would not only have fatigued him, but, consider-

ing his shortness of breath, would have worn him out so that he would in the end have fallen an easy prey, and been cudgelled without resistance till there was not a sound place left. Besides, it would have made the fight more interesting, considered as a work of art.

However, doubtless the next time—but then he remembered that the boy was going away.

'To seek my fortune, Fugleman,' Ralph said gaily. 'Look after Drusy for me, while I am away.'

'Aye—aye,' the Fugleman replied; 'she shall come to no harm. And as for money, Master Ralph?'

'I've got a guinea,' he replied, 'which my uncle gave me three years ago.'

'A guinea won't go far. Stay, Master Ralph. He went into his room and came back with a stocking in his hand. 'Here's all I've got, boy. It is twenty guineas. Take it all. I shall do very well. Lord! what with the rabbits and the pheasants——'

'Nay,' said Ralph, 'I will not take your savings neither.'

But, presently, being pressed, he consented to take ten guineas on the understanding that when he came back (his fortune made) the Fugleman was to receive twenty. And then they parted with a mighty hand-shake.

Half-way down the street Ralph passed Sailor Nan, who was sitting on a great stone beside her door, smoking her short black pipe.

'Whither bound, my lad?' she asked.

'I am bound to London,' he replied. 'I am off to seek my fortune.'

'Come here, I will read thy fortune.'

Like most old women, Nan could read a lad's fortune in the lines of his hand, or by the cards, or by the peeling of an apple.

'A good cruise,' she said, 'wtih fair wind aft and good weather for the most part. But storms belike on leaving port. There's a villain, and fighting, and foreign parts, and gold, and a good wife. Go thy ways, lad. Art no poor puss-faced swab to fear fair fighting. Go thy ways. Take and give. Trust not too many. And stand by all old shipmets. Go thy ways.'

He laughed and left her. Yet he was cheered by her kindly prophecy.

He crossed the old bridge and presently found himself outside the green palings of Dame Hetherington's house. The girl who had joined him in church was in the garden. He whistled and she came running.

'I am come to say good-bye, Drusy,' he said; 'I am running away.'

'Oh, Ralph, whither? And you have a cruel blow upon your face.'

'I have fought Mathew,' he said, 'and I have beaten him. This scar upon my face is nothing compared with the scars over his. I believe he is one large bruise. But I can no longer endure his ill-treatment and Barbara's continual reproaches. Therefore I am resolved to remain no longer, but shall go to London, there to seek my fortune as thy father did, Drusy.'

They talked for half an hour, she trying to persuade him to stay, and he resolved to go. Then he went with her into the house, where he must needs tell all the story to Dame Hetherington, who scolded him, and bade him get home again and make submission, but he would not.

Then Drusilla remembered that her father would gladly aid any lad from Northumberland, and sat down and wrote a letter very quickly, being dexterous with her pen, and gave it to Ralph to carry.

'You will find him,' she said, 'at the sign of the Leg and Star in Cheapside. Forget not that address. Stay, I will write it outside the letter. Give it him with my respect and obedience. Oh, Ralph, shall you be long before you have found your fortune and are back to us?'

'Nay,' said Ralph, 'I know not what may

be my fortune. I go to find it, like many a lad of old.'

Then, after many fond farewells, Ralph kissed her and trudged away manfully, while Drusy leaned her head over the garden-gate and wept and sobbed, and could not be consoled.

## CHAPTER III.

### HOW RALPH SOUGHT FORTUNE.

A YOUNG man's walk from Warkworth all the way to London cannot fail to be full of interest and adventure. There is, however, no space here to tell of the many adventures which befell this lad upon his journey. As for bad roads, he might have expected them, except that he was young and ignorant and expected nothing, so that each moment brought him some surprise, and each day taught him some new experience. As for the people to be met upon the roads, probably, had he known what to expect, he would have stopped short and sought fortune at Newcastle, Durham, or York, rather than have pressed on to London. But he was brave and full of hope. As to the roadside inns and the bedroom companions, he was astonished afterwards that he managed to get through all without having his weasand cut for the sake of his scanty stock of guineas, so desperate were some of the villains whom he

encountered. Nevertheless, even among the most desperate of rogues, there is hesitation about murder, and even about robbing lads and persons of tender years.

He stowed away his money within his waistcoat, keeping in his pocket nothing but two or three shillings for the daily wants; yet it seemed as if every man that he met had sinister designs upon him. If it was a solitary gipsy lying on the grass by the wayside, he rose to meet the boy as he went by, and looked highway robbery with resolution, yet refrained when he met equal resolution in the eyes of the wayfarer, and a stout stick in strong hands, and broad shoulders. If it was a pair of soldiers on the way to join their regiment, they stopped him, being two brave and gallant dare-devil heroes, and recommended the turning out of pockets, or else—— They swore terribly, these brave fellows, but a back-hander right and left with the cudgel, and then a light pair of heels, relieved the wayfarer of this danger, and left the heroes swearing more terribly than before, and lamenting the waste of good front teeth.

When he got near Durham he fell upon a party of pitmen out of work, and therefore parading the road, which is the manner of pitmen, one knows not what for except for mischief. These gentlemen of the underground, who have neither

religion nor education, and are, in fact, more savage and heartless than North-American savages, began to set upon the boy out of pure sport, as it they felt that somebody must be damaged in order to keep up their own spirits. They handled him roughly, not for the sake of robbing him, but because he was young and unprotected, just as on Sundays they throw at cocks; and it would have gone badly with him but for one among them who seemed to be a leader, and with many frightful imprecations bade his fellows let the boy alone. So they went on their godless way, and he went his, not much the worse for a roll in the dust.

As for the mounted highwaymen, they passed him or met him, riding in splendour, and scorned to fly at such small game as a country boy walking along the road. Substantial farmers riding home from market and tradesmen with money in their pockets were their prey. But Ralph met them in the evenings at the country inns, where they hardly pretended to disguise their profession, and bragged and swaggered among the admiring rustics over their punch, as if there were no such things as gallows and rope.

Worse than the highwayman was the common foot-pad, the cowardly and sneaking villain who would rob a little child of a sixpence—aye, and murder it afterwards to prevent discovery, and feel no remorse. When these road vagabonds

accosted the boy it was with intent to rob him, even of the coat upon his back; whereupon he either fought or else ran away. He fought so bravely with so stout a heart and so handy a cudgel, and he ran so fast, that he came to no harm; more than that, he left behind him on the road half-a-score desperadoes at least, who bore upon their gloomy countenances for life the marks of his cudgel, and swore to have his blood whenever they might meet with him again.

The road was not, however, a long field of battle for the lad, like his Progress to Christian the Pilgrim, nor did he meet with Apollyon anywhere. There were waggoners to talk with, friendly hawkers, whom the people call muggers, and faws, or tinkers, who are too often robbers and pilferers; also farmers, their wives and daughters, cattle-drovers, carriers, honest sailors, who would scorn to rob upon the highway, on their way to join ship, and pleasant little country towns every eight or ten miles, where one could rest and talk, and drink a tankard of cool small beer. Then, as it was early summer, when there are fairs going on in many places, the roads in some parts were full of the caravans and the show people, whom Ralph found not only a curious and interesting folk, but also friendly, and inclined to conversation with a stranger who was not a rival; who was ready to offer a tankard; who admired

without stint or envy the precious things they had to show, and who watched with delight unbounded and belief profound, the curious tricks, arts, artifices, and accomplishments by which they secured a precarious livelihood. In this way Ralph was so fortunate as to make personal acquaintance with the Pig-faced Lady, the Two-headed Calf, the Bous Potamos of Amphibious Beef (stuffed, but a most prodigious monster), and the Italian who played the pipe with his hands, the cymbals with his elbow, the triangle with his knees, and the bells with his head, while he made a most ingenious set of fantoccini dance with his right foot. All this the wonderful Italian would do, and he was not proud. Then there was the accomplished Posture Master, who had no joints at all in any of his limbs, but only flexible hinges turning every way, and could put arms, legs, head, fingers, and toes in any position he pleased. He had a monkey who had been taught to imitate him, but with stiffness. Ralph also was presented to an Albino or Nyctalope, a most illustrious lady, with hair a silvery white, and skin of incomparable clearness, but uncertain of temper; there were the wrestlers, boxers, and quarterstaff players, honest fellows and staunch drinkers, who went round from fair to fair to display their skill, fight with each other like Roman gladiators, and pick up the prizes; there were the conjurers and

magicians, who palmed things wherever they pleased as if they were helped by a devil or two; the seventh son, who read the future for all comers, and whose boast was that he was never wrong; the bear-leaders and badger-baiters; the flyer through the air, who made nothing of descending from a steeple-top on a rope with fireworks on his hands and feet; the dancers on the tight or slack rope; the thrower of somersaults; the itinerant cock-fighter, who would fight his cock against all comers for a guinea a side; the horse-dealer; the quack doctor, and his Merry-Andrew; the pedlar with his pack; the cheap book-seller, and the ballad-crier, with many more of the great tribe of wanderers. Ralph walked with them along the road, and heard their stories. He also learned some of the strange language in which they talk to each other when minded not to be understood by the bystanders.

When they came to their destination, and set up their canvas booths, he stayed too, and enjoyed the fun of the fair. At seventeen there is plenty of time to make your fortune, and why grudge a few days spent in watching the humours of a country fair? To be sure it cost some money, but he had still a good many of his guineas left, and no one could think a shilling or two ill-spent if one could see Pizarro acted in the most enthralling manner, or hear the most charming

singer in the whole world, dainty with ribbons, and a saucy straw hat, sing, 'Twas a Pretty Little Heart,' or 'Ben Bowsprit,' or 'Ned, You've no Call to Me.' Besides, there were the sports. Ralph played the cudgels one day and got a broken head, and won a 'plain hat, worth sixteen shillings,' but no one would give him more than four shillings and twopence for it; also he tried a fall, but was thrown by one mightier than himself in the Cumberland back-stroke; and he bowled for a cheese but did not win; and he longed to run in a sack but thought it beneath the dignity of a full-grown man. Also, there were lotteries; you could put in and draw everywhere all day long; there were prizes of sixpence, and prizes of ten pounds: he put in; sometimes he won, but oftener he lost, which is generally the way with sportsmen and those who wait upon the Goddess of Chance. At this Capua, or Paradise of Pleasures, which was then, and is still, called Grantham, Ralph had well-nigh taken a step which would have made his story much less interesting to us, though perhaps fuller of incident. For he made acquaintance—being a youth of innocent heart, and apt to believe in the honesty and virtue of everybody—with the company of players. Now it happened, first, that the troop were sadly in want of a young actor, if only to play up to the manager's daughter; and secondly, that

this young lady, who was as beautiful as the day and as vivacious as Mrs. Bracegirdle (she afterwards became a most famous London actress, and married an aged earl), cast eyes of favour on the handsome lad, longed very much for him to play Romeo to her Juliet, or Othello to her Desdemona, or any other part in which the beauty of a handsome woman is set off by the beauty of a handsome fellow, a thing which very few actresses can understand: they think, which is a great mistake, that it is better for them to be the only well-favoured creature on the stage. Wherefore the manager took Ralph aside privately, and offered him refreshment, either ale, or rumbo, or Barbadoes water, with tobacco if he chose, and had serious conversation with him, providing all his victuals and those as abundant as the treasury would allow, and a salary—say five shillings a week, to begin in a few months, as soon as he had learned to act, and to teach him the rudiments; and the honour and glory of playing principal parts; and his own daughter to play up to; and a possible prospect of appearing at Drury Lane.

It was a tempting offer; the stage—even the stage in a barn—seemed splendid to the lad; the voice and manner of the manager were seductive; more seductive still was the voice of his daughter. When she lifted her great eyes and met his he trembled and could not say her nay; when she

laid her pretty hand upon his, and begged him to stay with them and be her Romeo, what could he reply? Yet he remembered in time that he was on his way to seek his fortune; that the troop were obviously out at elbows, all horribly poor, and apparently badly fed; that to fall in love with an actress was not the beginning he had contemplated; and that Drusy, for her part, would certainly not consider a strolling actor's life as the most honourable in the world. He took a resolution: he would think no more upon those limpid eyes; he hardened his heart; he would fly. He did fly; but not before the young actress, who was already beyond his own age, and ought to have known better, had laid her arms round his neck and kissed farewell, with many tears, to her first love who would not love her in return. But her father was not displeased, and said, speaking more from a business point of view than out of paternal tenderness, that she would act the better for the little disappointment, and that it does them good, when they are young, to feel something of what they are always pretending. Said it put backbone into their attitudes and real tears in their eyes. Nothing on the stage so difficult as real tears, except a blush, which cannot be had for love or money.

Thus it happened that it was four or five weeks before Ralph got to London.

He arrived by way of Highgate. He reached the top of Highgate Hill at four in the afternoon. Here he sat down to rest, and to look upon the city he had come so far to see. There had been rain, but the clouds had blown over, leaving a blue sky, and a bright sun, and a clear air. He saw in the distance the towers and steeples of London; his long journey was done; the fortune he came to seek was—where was it? All the long way from Warkworth it seemed to him that when he reached London he would immediately find that thing known as fortune in some visible and tangible form, waiting to be seized by his strong young hands. Yet now that he saw before him the City of the Golden Pavement it seemed as if, perhaps—it was a chilling thought—he might not know or recognise, or be able to seize this fortune when he actually saw it. What is it like—Good Fortune? In other words, he began for the first time to experience the coldness of doubt which sometimes falls upon the stoutest of us. His cheek was by this time burned a deeper brown; his hands were dyed and tanned by the June sun; his coat and waistcoat were stained with travel and with rain; his shoes were worn through the soles; in his pocket jingled the last two of his eleven guineas. When they were gone, he reflected with dismay, what would have to be done? But it was not a time to sit and think.

Every fortune must have its beginning; every young adventurer must make a start; every Dick Whittington must enter the City of London. He rose, seized his bundle, and set off down the hill, singing to keep up his spirits, with as much alacrity as if he were only just starting on his way from Warkworth, and as if his heart was still warmed by the recollection of his cousin's bruises.

The way from Highgate to London lies along a pleasant road between tall hedges. On either side are fields and woods, and here and there a gentleman's seat or the country box of a successful citizen. Presently the boy reached Highbury, where the road bends south, and he passed Islington, with its old church and its narrow shady lanes thick with trees. On his right he saw a great crowd in a garden, and there was music. This was Sadler's Wells. Soon after this he arrived at Clerkenwell Green, and so by a maze of streets, not knowing whither he went, to Smithfield, where he found himself in the midst of the crowd which fills all the streets of the city from dawn till night. Such a crowd, men so rough, he had never seen before. They seemed to take pleasure in jostling and hustling each other as they went along. It gave occasion for profane oaths, strange threats, the exhibition of courage, and the provocation of fear. If they carried loads they went straight ahead, caring nothing who was

in the way. Some were fighting, some were swearing, some were walking leisurely, some were hastening along as if there was not a moment to be lost. There were open shops along one side; on another side was a great building, but what it was Ralph knew not. The broad open space was covered with pens and hurdles for cattle, and at the corners were booths and carts from which all kinds of things were sold. A man in a long black gown, with a tall hat and a venerable white beard, stood upon a platform in one place, a clown beside him, holding something in his hand and bawling lustily. When he was silent the clown turned somersaults. Ralph drew nearer and listened. He was selling a magic balsam which cured wounds as well as diseases. 'Only yesterday, gentlemen,' the quack was saying, 'at four in the afternoon, a young nobleman was brought to me run through the body. He bought the balsam, gentlemen, and is already recovered, though weak from loss of blood.' 'Buy! buy! buy!' shouted the clown. The people looked on, laughed, and went their way. Yet some stayed and bought a box of the precious ointment. Then there was a woman selling gin from a firkin or small cask on a cart. Her customers sat upon a stool and drank this dreadful stuff, which, as the ingenious Hogarth has shown, makes their cheeks pale and their eyes dull. And there was a stall

in which well-dressed city ladies sat eating sweetmeats, march pane, and China oranges, while outside stood a cow, and a woman beside her crying, 'A can of milk, ladies! A can of red cow's milk!' The boy looked about here a while, and passed on, wondering what great holiday was going. He knew not where he was, but that he was in London town. He was to find the sign of the 'Leg and Star' in Cheapside. Perhaps he would see it as he walked along. If not, he would ask. Meantime the novelty of the crowd and the noise of the streets pleased him, and he walked slowly with the rest. He would wait until there passed some gentleman of grave appearance of whom he could ask the way. But he was in no hurry. He went on, and although he knew not where he was, he walked through Giltspur Street, past Cock Lane (where afterwards appeared the ghost). On his left he saw Newgate, and so through Great Old Bailey to Ludgate Hill, where, indeed, for the magnificence of the people and the splendour of the shops he was indeed astonished. There were few of the rude jostling people here. Most were gentlemen in powdered wigs, ruffles, and gold-headed canes, being the better class of citizens taking the air in the evening before supper, or ladies in hoops and silks, with gold chains, fans, and gloves, walking with their husbands or their lovers, very beautiful to behold. The shops, not

yet shut for the day, had all sorts of signs swinging from the wall. There were the 'Frying Pan and Drum,' the 'Hog in Armour,' the 'Bible and Swan,' the 'Whale and Crow,' the 'Shovel and Boot,' the 'Razor and Strop,' the 'Axe and Bottle,' the 'Spanish Galleon,' the 'Catherine Wheel,' and a hundred others. But he saw not the sign of the 'Leg and Star.'

It was growing late. The boy was hungry and tired. He looked in at a coffee-house, but the company within, the crowds of fine gentlemen—some drinking coffee, wine, and brandy, and some smoking pipes—and the gaily-dressed young women who stood behind the counter, frightened him. He did not dare go in and call for a cup of coffee; besides, he had never tasted coffee. Then he passed a barber's shop, and thought he might ask of the barber, because at Warkworth the barber was everybody's friend, and perhaps this city barber might take after so good an example. He looked in at the open door, but quickly retreated. For within the shop were two or three gentlemen in the hands of the apprentices; and one, whose bald head was wrapped in a handkerchief, was singing some song which began, 'Happy is the child whose father has gone to the devil,' while the barber himself, with an apron on and a white nightcap, sat in a chair playing an accompaniment on a

kind of guitar. So Ralph went on his way, wondering what next he should see in London, and where this fortune of his might be found. Presently there came slowly along the street a venerable gentleman in an ample wig and a full black gown. He seemed to have a benevolent countenance. Ralph stopped him, and, pulling off his hat, ventured to ask this reverend divine if he would condescend to tell him the shortest way to the sign of the 'Leg and Star' in Cheapside.

'Stay, young man,' said the clergyman; 'I am somewhat hard of hearing.'

He pulled out and adjusted very slowly an ear-trumpet, into which Ralph bellowed his question. His reverence then removed the instrument, replaced it in his pocket, and shook his finger at the boy.

'So young,' he said, 'yet already corrupted! Boy, bethink thee that Newgate is but in the next street.'

With these words he went on his way, and left the lad greatly perplexed and humbled, and wondering what it was that he was supposed to have said.

It was, in short, seven of the clock when he found himself at the place whither he was bound. He had been wandering for an hour and a half, looking about him, and at last ventured to ask

the way of a servant-girl, who seemed astonished that he should not know so simple a thing as the most expeditious road to Cheapside, seeing that it was only the other side of Paul's. But she told him, and he presently found himself in the broad and wealthy street called Cheapside.

The 'Leg and Star' was on the south side, between Bread Street and Bow Church. It was a glover's shop, and because it was growing late, the boxes of gloves were now taken from the window, and the apprentices were putting all away. Ralph stopped and looked at the sign, then at the letter—which was not a little crumpled and travel-stained—and again at the sign. Yes, it must be the house, the sign of the 'Leg and Star,' in Cheapside.

At the door of the shop stood a tall and portly man, between fifty and sixty years of age, with large red cheeks and double chin. He was dressed in plain broadcloth and tye-wig, but he wore ruffles and neckcloth of fine white linen laced, as became a substantial citizen. Ralph knew it could be none other than Mr. Hetherington, wherefore he took off his hat and bowed low.

'What is thy business, young man?' asked the master glover.

'Sir, I bear a letter from your honour's daughter, now staying at Warkworth, in Northumberland.'

'My daughter! Then, prithee, boy, who are you?'

'My name is Ralph Embleton, and ——'

'Thou art the son, then, of my old friend, Jack Embleton? Come in, lad, come in.' He seized the boy by the arm and dragged him into the house and across the shop to the sitting-room at the back. 'Wife! wife!' he cried. 'Here is a messenger from Drusy with a letter. Give me the letter, boy. And this is young Ralph Embleton, son of my old friend and gossip, Jack Embleton, with whom I have had many a fight in the old days. Poor Jack! poor Jack! Well, we live. Let us be thankful. Make the boy welcome; give him supper. Make him a bed somewhere. What art thou doing in this great place, lad? So the letter—aye! the letter.'

He read the superscription, and slowly opened it and began to read:

'Dear and Hon'd Parents—The bairer of this is Rafe, who has run away from cruell treetment, and wants to make his fortune in London. He will tell you that I am well, and that I pray for your helthe, and that you will be kind to Rafe.—Your loving and dutiful d'ter,

'DRUSILLA.'

So,' went on the merchant, 'cruel treatment. Who hath cruelly ill-treated thee, boy?'

'I have run away, sir,' he said, 'from my

cousin, Mathew Humble, because he seeks every opportunity to do me a mischief. And, since he is my guardian, there is no remedy but to endure or to run away.'

'Ah! Mathew Humble, who bought my farm. Sam Embleton married his father's sister. Did your Uncle Sam leave Morwick Mill to Mathew?'

'No, sir; he left it to me.'

'And Mathew is your guardian? Yet the mill is your own, and you have run away from your own property? Morwick Mill is a pretty estate. It likes me not. Yet you would fain seek your fortune in London. That is well. Fortune, my lad, is only to be made by men of resolute hearts, like me.' He expanded as he spoke, and seemed to grow two feet higher and broad in proportion. 'And strong arms, like mine'—he hammered his chest as if it had been an anvil—'and keen eyes, like mine. Weak men fail and get trampled on in London. Cowardly men get set on one side, while the strong and the brave march on. I shall be, without doubt, next year, a Common Councilman. Strong men, clever men, brave men, boy, march, I say, from honour to greater honour. I shall become Alderman in two or three years, if Providence so disposes. There is no limit to the exalted ambitions of the London citizen. You would climb like me. You

would be, some day, my Lord Mayor. It is well. It does you credit. It is a noble ambition.'

Meantime a maid had been spreading the table with supper, and, to say the truth, the eyes of the boy were turned upon the cold meats with so visible a longing, that the merchant could not choose but observe his hunger. So he bade him sit and eat. Now, while Ralph devoured his supper, being at the moment one of the hungriest lads in all England, the honest glover went on talking in grand, if not boastful language, about himself and his great doings. Yet, inexperienced as he was, Ralph could not but wonder, because, although the merchant was certainly past fifty years of age, the great things were all in the future. He would become one of the richest merchants in London; he would be Lord Mayor; he would make his daughter a great heiress; he designed that she should marry a lord at least. At this announcement Ralph blushed and his heart sank. One of the reasons, said the merchant, why he kept her still in Northumberland was that he did not wish her to return home until they were removed to a certain great house which he had in his mind, but had not yet purchased. She should go in silk and satin; he would give such great entertainments that even the king should hear of them; London was ever the city for noble feasting. And so he talked, until the

lad's brain reeled for thinking of all these splendours, and he grew sad in thinking how far off Drusilla would be as, one by one, all these grandeurs became achieved.

Another thing he observed: that while the husband talked in his confident and braggart way, the wife, who was a thin woman, sat silent and sometimes sighed. Why did she sigh? Did she want to live on in obscurity? Had she no ambition?

Then the merchant filled and lit a pipe of tobacco, and proceeded to tell Ralph how he would have to begin upon this ambitious career in search of fortune. First, he would have to be an apprentice. 'I was myself,' said Mr. Hetherington, 'an apprentice, though who would think it now?' As an apprentice, he would sweep and clean out the shop, open it in the morning, and shut it at night, wait upon the customers all day, run errands, obey dutifully his master, learn the business, watch his master's interests, behave with respect to his betters, show zeal in the despatch of work, get no holidays or playtime, never see the green fields except on Good Fridays, take for meals what might be given him, which would certainly not be slices off the sirloin, and sleep under the counter at night. In short, the shop would be his work-room, his parlour, his eating-room, and his bed-room.

The boy listened to his instructions with dismay. Was this the road to fortune? Was he to become a slave for some years? But—after? His apprenticeship finished, it appeared that he might, if he could find money, open a shop, and become a master. But most young men, he learned, found it necessary to remain in the employment of their masters for some years, and in some cases for the whole term of their natural lives.

He did not consider that he had already such a fortune as would, if laid out with judgment, enable him to open a shop or to buy a partnership. He forgot at the time that he was the owner of Morwick Mill. It seemed to him, being so young and inexperienced, that he had run away from his inheritance, and abandoned it to Mathew. He, too, might therefore have to remain in a master's employment. This was fine fortune, truly, to be a servant all your days. And the boy began already even to regret his Cousin Mathew's blows and Barbara's cruel tongue.

His pipe finished, the merchant remembered that at eight his club would meet, and therefore left the lad with his wife.

'Boy,' she leaned over the table and whispered eagerly as soon as her husband was gone, 'have you come up to London without money to become a merchant?'

'Indeed, madam,' he replied, 'I know not what I may become.'

'Then fly,' she said; 'go home again. Follow the plough, become a tinker, a tailor, a cobbler—anything that is honest. Trade is uncertain. For one who succeeds a dozen are broke; you know not, any moment, but that you also may break. Your fortune hangs upon a hundred chances. Alas! if one of these fail, there is the Fleet, or may be Newgate, or Marshalsea, or Whitecross Street, or the King's Bench, or the Clink—there are plenty of places for the bestowal of poor debtors—for yourself, and for your wife and innocent children ruin and starvation.'

'Yet,' said Ralph, 'Mr. Hetherington is not anxious.'

'He leaves anxiety,' she replied bitterly, 'to his wife.'

Then she became silent, and spoke no more to the boy, but sat with her lips working as one who conversed with herself. And from time to time she sighed as if her heart was breaking.

In the morning the merchant was up betimes, and began again upon the glories of the city.

'Art still of the same mind?' he asked. 'Wilt thou be like Whittington and Gresham, and me, also one of those who climb the tree?'

Then Ralph confessed with a blush—which mattered nothing, so deep was the ruddy brown

upon his cheek—that he found city honours dearly bought at the price of so much labour and confinement.

'Then,' said his adviser in less friendly tones, 'what will you do?'

Ralph asked if there was nothing that a young man may do besides work at a trade or sit in a shop.

'Why, truly, yes,' Mr. Hetherington replied with severity; 'he may become a highwayman, and rob upon the road, taking their money from honest tradesmen and poor farmers—a gallant life indeed, and so he will presently hang in chains, or be anatomised and set up in Surgeons' Hall. There is the end of your fresh air for you.'

'But, with respect, sir,' Ralph persisted, "I mean in an honest way.'

'If he is rich enough he may be a scholar of Cambridge, and so take orders, or he may become a physician, or a lawyer, or a schoolmaster, or a surgeon, and go to sea in His Majesty's ships and lead a dog's life, or a soldier and go a fighting ——'

'Let me be a soldier,' cried the boy.

'Why, why? But you must first get His Majesty's commission, and to get this you must beg for letters to my Lord This and my Lord That, and dangle about great houses, praying for

their influence, and bribe the lacqueys, and then perhaps never get your commission after all.'

This was discouraging.

'Rolling stones, lad,' said the great merchant, 'gather no moss. Better stand quiet behind the counter, sweep out the shop, serve customers, and keep accounts, and perhaps some day be partner and grow rich.'

But Ralph hung his head.

'Then how can I help thee, foolish boy? Yet, because I knew thy father, and for Drusy's sake—— Stay, would you go to India?'

To India! Little, indeed, of the great doings in India reached the town of Warkworth. Yet Ralph had heard the Vicar talking with Mr. Carnaby of Colonel Clive and the famous battle of Plassy. To India! His eye flashed.

'Yes, sir; I would willingly go to India.'

'My worthy friend, Mr. Nathaniel Silvertop, is in the service of the Company. Come, let us seek his counsel.'

They walked, the boy being much astonished at the crowd, the noise, and the never-ceasing business of the streets, down Cheapside, through the Poultry, past the new Mansion House and the Royal Exchange, into Cornhill, where stands the Honourable East India Company's house, a plain solid building, adorned with pillars of the Doric order. Mr. Hetherington led the way into a

great hall, where was already assembled a crowd of men who had favours to ask of the directors, and finding a servant he sent his name to Mr. Silvertop.

Presently, for nothing was done in undignified haste in this house, Mr. Silvertop himself—a gentleman of three score, and of grave appearance—descended the stairs. To him Mr. Hetherington unfolded his business.

Here, he said, was a young fellow from Northumberland, heir to a small and pretty estate, but encumbered for three or four years to come with a guardian, whose affection he appeared to have unfortunately lost, so that it would be well for both to remain apart; but he was a young gentleman of roving tastes, who would fain see a little of the world, and—but this he whispered—a brave and bold fellow.

Mr. Silvertop regarded the lad attentively.

'Our writers,' he said solemnly, 'go out on small salaries. They seldom rise above four hundred or five hundred pounds a year at the most. Yet—mark this, young gentleman—so great are their chances in India that they sometimes come home at forty, or even less, with a hundred—aye, two hundred thousand pounds. Think upon that, boy! So great a thing it is to serve this Honourable Company.'

The boy's eyes showed no emotion. A dull

dog, indeed, he seemed to Mr. Silvertop, not to tremble at the mere mention of so vast a sum.

'Leave him here, my good friend,' said Mr. Silvertop. 'I have business, but I will return and speak with him again. He can walk in the hall and wait.'

Mr. Hetherington went his way, and Ralph waited.

After an hour or so, he saw Mr. Silvertop coming down the stairs again. He was escorting, or leading to the door, or in some way behaving in respectful and deferential fashion to a tall and splendid gentleman, brave in scarlet, wearing a sash and a sword and a gold-laced hat. At the foot of the stairs, Mr. Silvertop bowed low to this gentleman, who joined a little group of gentlemen, some of them also in scarlet. He seemed to be the chief among them, for they all behaved to him with the greatest respect. Then Mr. Silvertop looked about in the crowd, and spying Ralph, beckoned him to draw near and speak with him.

'So,' said Mr. Silvertop, 'you are the lad. Yes, I remember.' Ralph thought it strange that he should not remember, seeing that it was but an hour or so since Mr. Silvertop had spoken last with him. 'You are recommended by my friend Mr. Hetherington. Well, I know not—we

are pestered with applications for our writerships. Every runaway '—Ralph blushed—'every out-at-elbows younger son'—the great gentleman in scarlet, who was close at hand, here turned his head and looked at the lad with a little interest—'every poor curate's brat who can read and cypher wants to be sent to India.'

'You cannot, sir,' said the gentleman in scarlet, 'send too many Englishmen to India. I would that the whole country was ruled by Englishmen—yet not by quill-drivers.'

He added the last words in a lower voice, yet Ralph heard them.

Mr. Silvertop bowed low, and turned again to the boy.

'A writership,' he continued, 'is the greatest gift that can be bestowed upon a deserving lad. Remember that, and if—but I cannot promise. I would oblige my friend if I could—but I will not undertake anything. With my influence——yet I do not say for certain; a writership is a greater matter than you seem to think—I might bring thy case before the directors. Is thy handwriting fair, and thy knowledge of figures absolute?'

Ralph blushed, because his handwriting was short of the clerkly standard.

'I thank you, sir,' he said, 'but I love not writing. I would rather carry a sword than a pen.'



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'Ta-ta-ta,' replied Mr. Silvertop, whose influence lay wholly in the mercantile department of the company. 'We waste our time. A sword! I know naught of swords. Go thy ways, boy—go thy ways. Is London City, think you, a place for the carriage of swords? Go, take the king's shilling, and join a marching regiment. I warrant you enough of swords and bayonets.'

Ralph bowed and turned away sadly. The gentleman in scarlet, who had apparently been listening to the conversation, followed him to the doors with thoughtful eyes.

'A lad who would rather handle a sword than a pen,' he said. 'Are there many such lads left in this city of trade and greed?'

They looked, at the 'Leg and Star,' that day, for the return of the young Northumbrian in time for dinner. But he came not; nor did he come at night; nor did he ever come. No one knew whither he had gone or what had become of him, and much Mr. Hetherington feared that in this wicked town he had been enticed by some designing wretch to his destruction.

## CHAPTER IV.

### DRUSILLA'S STORY.

I WAS born in Cheapside, almost beneath the bells of Bow, on October 5, in the year of grace 1753, being the fifth and youngest child of Solomon Hetherington and Prudence his wife. My father was a citizen and glover, a member of the Honourable Company of Glovers, his ambition being always to be elected, before becoming Lord Mayor, Master of his Company. These ambitions are laudable in a city merchant, yet, alas! they are not always attained, and in my unhappy father's case they were very far from being reached, as you shall presently hear.

There is, I am told, some quality in the London air which causeth the city, in spite of much that is foolish as regards cleanliness, to be a healthy place, and favourable to children. So that, for my own part, though I was brought up in the very centre and heart of the city, with no green fields to run in, nor any gardens save those

belonging to the Drapers' Company, I, as well as my brothers and sisters, was a healthy and well-faring child up to the age of eight, when I, with all my brothers and sisters, was afflicted with that scourge of mankind, small-pox. This dreadful disease, to the unspeakable grief of my parents, killed their four eldest children, and spared none but myself, the youngest, and a girl. To lose three strong and promising boys, the hope of the house, as well as a girl of fourteen, already beginning to be useful, was a most dreadful thing, and I wonder that my mother, who passionately loved her boys, ever recovered cheerfulness. Indeed, until her dying day she kept the annual recurrence of this day, which robbed her of her children—for they all died on the same day—in prayer and fasting and tears. Yet I was left, and, by further blessing of Heaven, I recovered so far that, although I was weakly and ailing for a long time, I was not marked by a single spot or any of those ugly pits, which sometimes ruin many a woman's beauty and thereby rob her of that choicest blessing, the love of a husband. So different, however, was I from the stout and hearty girl before the small-pox, that my parents were advised that the best chance to save my life —this being for the time their chief and even their only hope—was to send me into the country, there to live in fresh pure air, running in the sun,

and fed on oatmeal porridge, good milk, fat bacon, and new-laid eggs.

Then my father bethought him of his own mother who lived far away indeed from London, namely at Warkworth, in Northumberland. And he proposed to my mother that they should take this long journey, carrying me with them, and leave me for a while in charge of my grandmother; which being done, and my health showing signs of amendment, they were constrained to go back to their own business, leaving me in good hands, yet with sorrowful hearts, because they were going home without me. And for six or seven years I saw them no more.

No girl, to be sure, had kinder treatment or more indulgent governess than myself. My grandmother, Dame Hetherington—though not a lady by birth, but only a farmer's daughter—lived in the house which stands outside the town, beyond the bridge, among the trees. You may know it by its garden and green railings. It is a small house, yet large enough for the uses and wants of an old lady and a single serving-maid. She was then about seventy years of age, but this is considered young in Northumberland, and I have seen many ladies from London and the south country, or even out of Scotland, who at fifty were not so active. She lived upon an annuity, forty pounds a year, which her son

bought for her when he sold his father's farm of thirty acres; it was bought by Mathew Humble. As for the cottage, it was also my father's, and the Dame lived in it, rent free.

It was the Dame, my grandmother, who taught me all household things, such as to spin, to sew, to darn, to hem, to knit, to embroider, to bake and brew, to make puddings, cakes, jellies, and conserves, to compound skilfully cowslip, ginger, and gooseberry wine; to clean, sweep, dust, and keep in order my own and all the other rooms in the house. It was the Vicar's wife who undertook—there being no school in the town, save a humble Dame's school—to teach me reading, writing, cyphering, together with my Catechism and the Great Scheme of Christian Redemption, of which, being the daughter of pious parents, I already possessed the rudiments. There were not many books to read in the house, because my grandmother did not read; but there were the Bible, the Apocrypha, the Pilgrim's Progress, a book of Hymns and Pious Songs, and a bundle of the cheap books which tell of Valentine and Orson, Dick Whittington, the last Appearance of the Devil, and the latest Examples of Divine Wrath against fools and profligates.

But because the Dame, my grandmother, was a wise woman, and reflected that I was sent away from London in order to recover my health and

grow strong, I was allowed and encouraged to run about in the open air as much as possible, so that, as this part of England is quite safe, and there are here few gipsies (who mostly stay on the other side of Cheviot) nor any robbers on the road—nor, indeed, any road at all to signify—I very soon grew to know the whole country within the reach of a hearty girl's feet.

There is plenty to see, though this part of Northumberland is flat, while the rest is wild and mountainous. Firstly, there are the ruins of the old castle, about which it is always pleasant for a child to run and climb, or for a grown person to meditate on the vanity of earthly things, seeing that this pile of ruins was once a great and stately castle, and this green sward was once hidden beneath the feet of fierce soldiers, who now are dust and ashes in the grave-yard. From the castle one looks down upon the Coquet, which would ever continue in my eyes the sweetest of rivers, even were I to see the far-famed Tiber, or the silver Thames, or the great Ganges, or the mysterious Nile, or even the sacred Jordan. It winds round the foot of the hill on which the castle is built. There is one spot upon its banks where I have often stood to watch the castle rising proudly—albeit, in ruins—above the hill, and wholly reflected in the tranquil waters below. It was my delight to scramble down the banks and

to wander fearless along the windings of the tortuous stream, watching the brightness of its waters, now deep, now broad, now silent, now bubbling with the fish leaping up and disappearing, and the woods hanging on the rising bank. If you sat quite quiet, moving not so much as a finger, you might, if you were lucky, presently see a great otter swimming along in the shadow of the bank, and you would certainly see a water-rat sitting in the sun. But if you move so much as an eyelid the rat drops into the water like a stone. Or if you crossed the river, which you can very easily do in some parts by taking off your shoes and stockings and wading, you could go visit the Hermitage. There is the little chapel in which the hapless solitary prayed, and the figure which he rudely sculptured, and even the stone bed on which he lay and the steps of the altar worn by his knees. But children think little of these things, and to me it was only a place where one could rest in cool shade when the sun was hot, or seek shelter from the cold blast of the winter wind.

Higher up the river was Morwick Mill, where Ralph Embleton lived with his uncle.

Or, again, if instead of crossing the bridge and going up to the castle, you walked across the fields which lay at the back of the garden—wild and barren fields covered with tufts of coarse

grass—you came, after half a mile or so of rough walking, to the sea-shore, fringed with low sand-hills. It was an endless joy to run over these hills and explore their tiny valleys and peaks of twenty feet high at least. Or one could wander on the sands, looking at the waves, an occupation which never tires, or watching sea-gulls sailing with long white wings in the breeze, or the little oxbirds on the sands. If you walked down instead of up the river, you came, after three miles, to its mouth and the little town of Amble, where every man is a fisherman.

Beyond the town, half a mile out to sea, lies the little island of Coquet. Ralph once rowed me across the narrow channel, and we explored the desert island and thought of Robinson Crusoe, which he had read and told me. But this was before the time when we took to pretending at ghosts.

In those days, which seem to have been so happy, and I dare say were, Ralph was free, and could come and go as pleased him best, save that he went every morning to the Vicar, who taught him Latin and Greek, and sometimes remembered —but in kindly moderation—the advice of Solomon. The reason of this freedom was that his uncle, with whom he lived, loved the lad greatly, and intended great things for him, even designing that he should become a great scholar and go to Cambridge. For once there was a member of

his family who took to learning and rose from being a poor scholar in that University, which has ever been a kindly nurse or foster-mother of poor scholars, to be a Doctor of Divinity and a Bishop. But my Ralph was never to be a Bishop, nor even a Doctor of Divinity. And a sad change was to happen at the mill.

Everybody was our friend in those days, from Mr. Cuthbert Carnaby, Justice of the Peace, and the Vicar, down to Sailor Nan and her lodger, Dan Gedge, the Strong Man. Everybody had a kind word for Ralph, and nobody told me then how wicked it was to run about with a boy of such unnatural depravity. This, as you will see, was to come. He was a tall boy for his years, and he was six years older than myself, which proves how good-natured he must have been, for few boys of fifteen or sixteen care for the companionship of a girl of nine or ten. As for his face, it has always been the dearest face in the world to me, and always will be, so that I know not whether other people would call it a handsome face. His eyes were eager, as if—which was the case—he always wanted to be up and doing. They were blue eyes, because he was a Northumberland lad, yet not soft and dreamy eyes, as is too often the case with the people of the north. His face was oval and his features regular. He carried his head thrown back, and

walked erect with both hands ready, as if there was generally a fight to be expected, and it was well to be prepared. To be sure, Ralph was one of those who love a fight and do not sulk if they are beaten, but bide a bit and then on again.

On Sunday afternoons, who so ready as he at quarterstaff or wrestling, or any of the manly sports? As regards the cock-fighting, bull-baiting, and dog-fighting, with which our common people so love to inflame their passions and to destroy their sensibility, Ralph would none of it, because he loved dogs, and, indeed, all animals. But at an otter-hunt he was always to the front. He was not fond of books and school-learning, yet he loved to read of foreign lands and of adventures. The Vicar lent him such books, and he told me, long before I thought that he too would become such an one himself, of Pizarro, Cortes, Raleigh, and Francis Drake (not to speak of Robinson Crusoe and Captain Gulliver), and of what great things they did and what fine places they visited. A brave boy always, whose heart leaped up when he heard of brave things.

All the town, I have said, were our friends. But of course we had some who were more with us than others. For instance, what should we have been without the Fugleman? To those who do not know him he was the chief terror of the town, being so stern and lean in appearance, so

stiff and upright, and, besides, officially connected with such things as stocks, whipping-post, pound, and pillory: names of rebuke. To Ralph and to me he was a trusted and thoughtful friend, almost a playfellow. His room at the gateway of the castle, to which he had fitted a door and a window of glass in a wooden frame, was full of things curious and delightful. He had eggs strung in long festoons round the walls, and could tell us where to look for the nests in spring; he had a ferret in a box; he had fishing-rods and nets; he had traps for wild fowl, and for rabbits; he had a fowling-piece, and he could tell us stories without end of his campaigns. Why, this brave fellow, who was for thirty years and more in the Fourteenth Berkshire Regiment, could tell us of the great review held on Salisbury Plain by his majesty King George the First, of pious memory. He could tell us of the famous Siege of Gibraltar, when the regiment was commanded by Colonel Clayton, and of the Battle of Dettingen, where that gallant officer was killed; of Culloden and the Young Pretender. A brave regiment always and strong in Protestant faith, though much given to drink, and only kept in paths of virtue by strict discipline and daily floggings.

Had it not been for the Fugleman—and Sailor Nan, of whom more anon—I for one should never have learned about foreign places at all, any more

than the rest of us in Warkworth. Now, indeed, having heard him talk about them so often, I seem to know the phlegmatic Dutch and the slow German, and the Frenchmen with their love of glory, and the Spaniards with their Papistical superstitions, and the cruel ways of the Moors, because the Fourteenth were once at Tangiers.

Ralph, of course, knew much more than I, because he was more curious, being a boy, and asked many more questions, being always, as I have said already, thirsty for information concerning other people. No one else in Warkwork had been abroad, not even Mr. Carnaby, though gentlemen of good birth, like himself, sometimes made the grand tour in their youth, accompanied by tutors. Yet Mr. Carnaby said that they often learned more wickedness than good, and would have been better at home. No one else talked about foreigners or knew anything of them, finding sufficient subject for conversation in the weather and the events of the day in town and country side. I do not except Sailor Nan, although she had sailed over many seas, because a person who only goes to sea remains always, it seems to me, in one spot.

Northumberland is enough, indeed, for the Northumbrians. To begin with, there is no part of England where there is so much left to be told by the old women, who are ever the collectors

and treasurers of things gone by and old stories. Why, men are as wasteful of their recollections as of their money, and were it not for the women, the past would perish. It seems to me as if the Dame could never come to an end with the tales she told me, the songs she sang me (in a pretty voice still, though a little cracked with age), the proverbs she had for every occasion, and the adventures of many people with ghosts and fairies, There was the story of the Loathly Worm of Bamborough, to begin with, and the terrible tale of Sir Guy the Seeker. I have stood amid the ruins of Dunstanburgh and wondered where might be the door through which he entered when he found the beautiful lady. Then there was the story of the farmer who found King Arthur and all his knights in an enchanted sleep, under Sewing Shields Castle. He saw waiting for the first comer a sword and a horn. He drew the sword, indeed, but was too terrified to blow the horn.

> Oh, woe betide that evil day
> On which the witless wight was born,
> Who drew the sword, the garter cut,
> But never blew the bugle-horn.

There was the story of the simple man of Ravensworth who died, and was dead for twenty-four hours, during which he was permitted to see both Heaven and Hell, and was sent back to earth to tell the Bishop that he must prepare for death.

There was the story of the other simple countryman who had a dream of treasure. In his dream he saw the place where the treasure lay. It was in a triangular space made by three great stones beneath the ground. That simple man was so foolish as to tell his dream. Again the dream came to him. This time he got up early in the morning and went out, spade in hand, to dig. Alas! he was too late. Someone else had been there before him, guided by the first dream, and all that was left was the triangular space made by the three great stones. There was the other treasure-story connected with the name of Nelly the Knocker. Nelly the Knocker was the ghost of an old woman. She came every evening at dusk, and she stationed herself before a great stone standing by the roadside near a farm. Here she knocked with a hammer. Everybody had seen her—no one was afraid of her; the rustics were so used to her that they passed her without a shudder, though, of course, no one ventured quite close to her; her tapping was heard a long way off. One day two men thought they would dig under the stone, to see if anything was there. They dug, and they found a great pot full of gold coins. So that Nelly the Knocker was justified of her knocking. But she came no more. There was still another story of treasure: how it lay buried under a great stone, and how those who would dig for it

were frightened away by a figure in white which seemed to fly from under it, no one having courage to remain after the appearance of that figure. There were, lastly, the stories of the fairies who were brought into the country by the Crusaders, never having been heard of before. I have since wondered how they were brought: whether in boxes, or in cages, or in what other way. Those of Northumberland have yellow hair; they live in chambers under green hills; they have a great day of meeting every year—namely, on the eve of Roodsmass, called by some Hallowe'en. The chief mischief they do—it is, to be sure, a very great mischief—is to steal the babies (wherefore at reaping-time it is most dangerous to leave their little children under the hedges) and to substitute changelings.

'My dear,' said the Dame, gravely, 'I have known such a changeling. His name was Little Hobbie o' the Castleton; he was a dwarf, and wrathful by disposition, insomuch that he would draw his gully upon any of the boys who offended him. But his legs were short, whereby he was prevented from the wickedness of murder, or at least striking and wounding.'

There was also the Brown Man of the Moors, but one feared him not at Warkworth, where there are no moors. And there was the fearful Ghost of Black Heddon, known as Silky, because

she always appeared dressed in silk; a stately dame, the sight of whom terrified the stoutest.

These are only a few of the tales with which my childish head was filled, and though I know that scoffers may laugh, in an age which affects with incredible boldness to disbelieve even the most sacred things, we of the country know very well that these things are too well authenticated not to be true. As regards Silky, for instance, the man was still living and could be spoken with when I was a girl, who, being then a youth of tender years, proposed to personate the figure in white which sometimes stood or sat by the bridge on the road to Edlingham from Alnwick. He put on a sheet and sat upon the bridge, expecting to frighten passengers. Lo! beside him he saw, suddenly, the real ghost, saying never a word. And at sight of her he fell backwards over the bridge into the water and broke his leg, so that he went halt to his dying day. This ought to have been a warning both to Ralph and myself: but, alas! it was not.

Sailor Nan, who lived in a cottage up the street between the church and the castle, had seen many ghosts, but hers were sea-ghosts, because, though she had sailed in a great many seas, she had never been ashore—I do not count an hour's run among grog-shops going ashore—in foreign parts, except at Portobello, when that place was

taken in the year 1739, when she was with Admiral Burford, being also captain of the foretop, and at the time about thirty-six years of age; here, by reason of a wound, her sex was discovered, so that they disrated her and sent her home. Her memory being good and her recollections being copious, her house was much frequented by young people who loved to hear how she boarded the 'Santa Isabella' when aboard the 'Dorsetshire,' under Admiral Delaval, or how she was present at the famous cutting out of the pirate, with the hangings at the yard-arm of the pirate captain and all his crew, and how the ghost of the carpenter (unjustly hanged) haunted the main deck. She was at this time—I mean at the time when Ralph did penance—about sixty years of age. She wore a sailor's three-cornered hat, cocked, a thick woollen wrapper round her neck, and petticoats almost as short as a sailor's. She wore also thick worsted stockings and men's shoes, so that it was difficult to understand that she was a woman and not a man. Her voice could be either rough and coarse like a sailor's, or thin like a woman's, as she pleased; round her waist she tied a cord, which had a knife at the end of it. She smoked tobacco continually, and drank as much rum as ever she could get. She lived chiefly by selling tansy cakes. After she was dismissed from the navy

she married twice. Her first husband was hanged for selling a stolen pig at Morpeth Fair, and her second hanged himself—some said on account of his wife's cudgel. 'Hinneys,' she would say, 'it's a fine thing to dee your own fair death.' Her conversation was full of strange sea oaths, and she was still as strong as most men are at thirty, with thick brawny arms and sturdy feet, a woman who feared no man. Besides her tansy cakes she told fortunes to those who would give her silver, and she grew in her garden, and sold, marsh and marigold. A tough, hardened old woman, her face beaten and battered by all kinds of weather, who sat outside her door on a big stone all day long, winter and summer, rain, snow, frost, hail, east wind, south wind, sunshine, cloud, or clear, smoking a black pipe of tobacco, and carrying in her hand a stick with which she threatened the children when they ran after her, crying, 'Sailor Nan, Sailor Nan; half a woman, half a man!' But I do not think that she ever harmed any of them. People came to see her from all the country-side, partly to talk with her, because she was so full of stories, and partly to look at a woman who had actually carried a cutlass, handled pike and marlinspike, been captain of the foretop, brandished a petty officer's rope's-end, manned a boat, fought ashore side by side with the redcoats, and valiantly boarded an

enemy. In the end she lived to be a hundred and eight, but she never altered or looked any older, or lost her faculties, or drank less rum, or smoked less tobacco.

When Ralph was nearly fifteen a great and terrible misfortune befell him. His uncle, Mr. Samuel Embleton, though not an old man, died suddenly. After he was buried it was found that he had left by will Morwick Mill and the farm, his household furniture, his books, which were not many, and all the money he had in the world, to Ralph as his sole heir. This inheritance proved at first the cause of great unhappiness to the boy. For, unfortunately, the will named Mathew Humble as the guardian and executor, to whom the testator devised his best wig and his best coat with his second-best bed and a gold-headed stick. Now it angered Mathew to think that he, being also nephew and sister's son of Samuel Embleton, of Morwick Mill, was left no part or portion of this goodly heritage. It would seem that knowing his uncle's design to send Ralph to Cambridge, and his hope that he would become a credit to the family and a pillar of the Church, he had hoped and even grown to believe firmly and to expect it as a right, that the mill at least, if not the farm, or a portion of it, would be left to him. It was, therefore, a bitter blow for him to find that he was left nothing at all except what he

could make or save as guardian of the heir and administrator of the estate, with free quarters at the mill, for six years. Surely for a man of probity and common-sense that would have been considered a great deal.

He came, with his sister, who was as much disappointed as himself, in a spirit of rancour, malice, and envy. He regarded the innocent boy as a supplanter. The first thing he did was to inform him that he should have no skulking or idleness. He therefore put a stop to the Latin and Greek lessons from the Vicar, and employed the boy about the work of the place, giving him the hardest and the most disagreeable tasks on the farm. For freedom was substituted servitude ; for liberty, restraint ; for affection and kindness, harsh language and continual floggings ; while Barbara with her tongue, that ill-governed weapon of women, made him feel, for the first time in his life, how idle, how useless, how greedy a creature he was. The boy bore with all, as meekly as was his duty, for quite two years. But he often came to me, or to the Fugleman, with fists clenched, declaring that he would endure this ill-usage no longer, and asking in wonder what he had done to deserve it. And at such times he would swear to leave the mill and run away and seek his fortune anywhere—somewhere in the world. It was always in his mind, from the first, when Mathew

began his ill-treatment, that he would run away and seek his fortune. In this design he was strengthened by the example of my father, who left the village when a boy of fourteen to seek his fortune, and found—you shall hear presently what he found. I dissuaded him, as much as I could, because it was dreadful for me to think of being left without him, or of his running about the country helpless and friendless. The Fugleman, who knew the world and had travelled far, pointed out to him very sensibly that he would have to endure this hardness for a very short time longer, that he was already sixteen and as tall as most men, and could not for very shame be flogged much more; while, as for Barbara's tongue, he declared that a brave man ought not to value what a woman said—let her tongue run as free as the serjeant at drill of recruits—no more than the price of a rope's end: and, again, that in five years' time, as soon as Ralph was twenty-one, he would have the right to turn his cousin out of the mill, which would then become his own property, and a very pretty property too, where an old friend would expect to find a pipe and a glass of Hollands or rum. And he promised himself to assist at the ducking in the river which he supposed that Ralph would give his cousin when that happy day should arrive, as well as at the great feast and rejoicing which he supposed would

follow. The result of these exhortations, to which were added those of my grandmother, was that he remained at home, and when Mathew Humble cruelly belaboured him, he showed no anger or desire for revenge, and when Barbara smote him with harsh words and found texts out of the Bible to taunt him with, he made no reply. Nor did he rebel even though they treated him as if he were a common plough-boy and farm drudge, instead of the heir to all.

I confess, and have long felt sincerely, the wickedness of the thing which at length brought open disgrace upon poor Ralph and drove him away from us. Yet, deserving of blame and punishments as our actions were, I cannot but think that the conduct of Mathew in bringing the chief culprit—he knew nothing of my share or of the Fugleman's —before his Worship, Mr. Justice Carnaby, was actuated more by malice than by an honest desire to bring criminals to punishment. Besides, he had for some months before this been spreading abroad wicked rumours about Ralph, saying, among other false and malicious things, that the boy was idle, gluttonous, lying, and even thieving, insomuch that the Vicar, who knew the contrary, and that the boy was as good a lad as ever walked, though fond of merriment and a little headstrong, openly rebuked him for malice and evil-thinking, saying plainly that these things were

not so, and that, if they were so, Mathew was much to blame in blabbing them about the country, rather than trying to correct the lad's faults, and doing his best to hide them from the general knowledge. Yet there are some who always believe what is spoken to one's dispraise, and sour looks and unfriendly faces were bestowed upon the boy, while my grandmother was warned not to allow me to run wild with a lad of so notorious a bad character. This is all that I meant when I said just now that at first all were our friends.

When Ralph was gone I took little joy in anything until I got my first letter from him, which was not for a very long time afterwards.

Now, one day, as I was walking sorrowfully home, having sat all the afternoon with the Fugleman, I saw Sailor Nan beckoning to me from her stone outside the door.

'Child,' she said, 'where's your sweetheart?'

'Alack,' I replied, 'I know not, Sailor Nan.'

'Young maids,' she went on, 'must not puke and pine because they hear nothing for awhile of the lads they love. Be of good cheer. Why, I read him his fortune myself in his own left hand. Did my fortunes ever turn out wrong? As good a tale of luck and fair weather as I ever read.

Come, child, give me thy hand; led me read your lines too.'

It is strange how in the lines of one's hand are depicted beforehand all the circumstances of life, easy to be read by those who are wise. Yet have I been told that it is not enough to learn the rules unless you have the gift.

'He will come back,' she repeated, after long looking into the hand. 'Now, your own hand. Here is a long line of life—yet not as long as my own. Here is the line of marriage—a good line; a happy marriage; a fortunate girl—yet there will be trouble. Is it an old man? I cannot rightly read. Something is in the way. Trouble, and even grievous trouble. But all to come right in the end.'

'Is my fortune,' I asked, 'connected with the fortune of Ralph?'

She laughed her rough, hoarse sea-laugh.

'If it is an old man, or if it is a young man, say him nay. Bide your old love. If he press or if he threaten, say him nay. Bide your old sweetheart.

'There was an old man came over the lea,
Heigho! but I won't have 'un;
Came over the lea,
A courtin' to me,
Wi' his old gray beard just newly shaven.'

She crooned out the words in a cracked and

rusty voice, and pushed my hand away roughly. Then she replaced her pipe in her mouth and went on smoking the tobacco which was her chief food and her chief solace, and took no further heed of me.

## CHAPTER V.

### A SECOND WHITTINGTON.

It becomes not a young girl to pronounce judgment openly (whatever she may think) upon the conduct of her elders, or to show resentment, whatever they may think fit to do; so that when Mathew Humble came to see my grandmother on certain small affairs which passed between them—concerning the sale of a pig, or I know not what—it was my duty, though my heart was aflame, to sit, hands in lap, quiet and mum, when I would rather, Heaven knows, have been boxing his ears and railing him in such language as I could command, for I certainly could never forget, while this man, with the fat red cheeks and pig's eyes, was drinking my grandmother's best cowslip wine, as if he had been the most virtuous of men, that it was through him—though this my grandmother knew not, for I never told her—that Ralph had been betrayed to his Worship, and so been brought to public shame; that it was this

man who had beaten the boy without a cause, and that it was his sister who daily sought out hard words and cruel texts, as well as coarse crusts, with which to torture my Ralph. I remembered, as well, that it was this man who had been soundly cudgelled and flogged by the boy he had abused so shamefully.

'You have heard nothing, I dare say, Mr. Mathew,' asked the Dame, for it was now two months after the poor lad's flight, 'of our young runaway, whom we in this house greatly lament and wish him well?'

'Nothing as yet,' replied Mathew. Then he drank off the rest of his glass, and went on with much satisfaction: 'I fear'—yet he looked as if he hoped—'that we shall hear nothing until we hear the worst, as provided by the righteous laws of this country. What, madam, can be expected of one so dead and hardened unto conscience as to offer violence and to turn upon his guardian, and take him while off his guard and unawares with bludgeons and cudgels?'

The whole town had heard by this time and knew very well how Ralph, before his flight, refused to be flogged, and fought his guardian and vanquished him, insomuch that grievous weals were raised and bruises sad to tell of. It was Mathew's version that he was taken by surprise. Otherwise, he said, it was nothing but Heaven's

mercy prevented him from grievously wounding and hurting the boy, who ran away for fear and dared not come back. Opinion was divided: for some called shame on Mathew for flogging so tall and strong a lad—almost a man—and others declared that stripes, and those abundant and well laid on, alone could meet the deserts of one guilty of bringing ghostly visitors into discredit, because, should such practices continue, no ghost, even one who came to tell of buried treasure, would be sure of his—or her—reception, and might be scoffed at as an impostor, instead of being received with terror and the fearful knocking together of knees.

But mostly the general opinion was in favour of the boy and his flight; the folk rejoiced that Mathew had met his match; and our ignorance of Ralph's fate made the people remember once more his many good qualities, his merry friendliness, his honest face, and his blithe brown eyes, in spite of the ghost pretences and the stories spread abroad by his cousins.

'That,' said my grandmother, in answer to Mathew, 'was wrong, indeed. I had hoped that the lad would have returned, made submission, received punishment, and been pardoned. He was ever a boy of good disposition, and his uncle loved him, Mathew—a thing which did, without doubt, prepossess you in his favour.'

Mathew slowly put down his empty glass, and held up both hands to show astonishment.

'Good disposition? This, madam, springs from your own goodness of heart. Who in Warkworth doth not know that the boy was already, so to speak, a man grown, so far as wickedness is concerned? He of a good disposition? Alas, madam, your heart is truly too full of kindness! For the sake of Missy here—who grows a tall lass—I am glad that he is gone, because he would have taught her some of his own wickedness. Alas!' here he spread his hands, 'the things that I could tell you if I would. But one must spare one's cousin. Greediness, laziness, profligacy, luxury. Ha! but I speak not of these matters, because he was my cousin. For his own sake, and because at his age an evil-disposed boy cannot but feel the want of those paternal corrections which I never spared, I grieve that he is no longer with us.'

'Nevertheless, Mr. Mathew,' said my grandmother, smiling, 'I cannot believe, even though you assure us, that Ralph was so wicked as all this, and I hope, for the credit of your family, that you will diligently spread abroad a better opinion. No one is hardened at sixteen.'

'Except Ralph,' said Mathew, shaking his head.

'And I for one shall continue to hope the

best. He will return to us, Mr. Mathew, before long, penitent, and desirous of pleasing his guardian, and you will then be able to correct your judgment.'

'I do not think he will ever return,' said his cousin. 'As for being penitent, he must first take the punishment which awaits him. As for desiring to please——' He stopped short, doubtless remembering that alder-branch.

'If he does not return,' my grandmother continued, 'till after he becomes of age, it will be your great happiness to hand over his property, well husbanded and with careful stewardship.' Here Mathew shut both his eyes and shook his head, but I know not why. 'You will feel the pleasure of doing good to one who undutifully offered you violence. He will be the opposite to the man in the parable, for he will have left his talent tied up in a napkin, and he will return and find it multiplied.'

'Such as Ralph,' said Mathew, grimly, 'do not repent, nor desire to please, nor return. He began with penance—public penance—think upon that—and saying the Lord's Prayer aloud. He will be advanced next—which is the regular course of such as him—to pillory. After penance, pillory. It is the regular thing. After pillory, stocks; after stocks, whipping-post or cart-tail; after cart-tail, burning in the hand. Lastly, he will be

promoted to the gallows.' He positively rubbed his hands together, and laughed at this delightful prospect. Why did he wish his cousin hanged, I wonder, unless that he would then get the mill?

'I trust not,' said the Dame. 'Meantime, you will guard his property.'

'His property!' his face grew quite black. 'His property! Why, if he comes back there will be something said about that as well. Ha! His property! Ha!'

'But, surely, Mr. Mathew, his uncle bequeathed Morwick Mill to Ralph?'

'That, madam, has been the belief of the world. Nevertheless—— But I say nothing. This is not the time for serious talk.'

When he was gone, my grandmother, who seldom discussed such high matters with me, said:

'Drusilla, I like it not. Doth Mathew Humble desire the death of his cousin? It would seem so. Pillory, stocks, whipping-post, gallows? All for our Ralph? Why this passeth understanding! And wherefore this talk of the world's belief? I like it not, child.'

'But you do not think, grandmother, that Ralph will——'

'I think, child, that Ralph is a good lad, but headstrong, perhaps, and impatient of control. Wherever he is I will warrant him honest. Such boys get on, as your father got on. Some day, I

make no doubt that he will return. But as for Mathew Humble, I like not his manner of speech.'

The same day she put on her bonnet and best shawl and went to the house of Mr. Cuthbert Carnaby, from which I gathered—my little wits jumping as fast as bigger ones—that she went to lay the case before his Worship, which perhaps was the reason why, when Mr. Carnaby next met Mathew (it was after church on Sunday), he informed him that it should be his own business to watch that the mill and farm were properly managed in the interests of the heir, and that a strict account would be required when Ralph returned and came of age. Whereat Mathew became confused, and stammered words incoherent about proving who was the rightful heir. Yet, for the moment, nothing more was said upon that subject.

The summer and the autumn passed, but no sign or letter came from Ralph. The people in the town ceased, after the manner of mankind, to think of the boy. He was gone and forgotten, yet there were two or three of us who spoke and thought of him continually. First there was the Fugleman, who found his life dull without the boy to talk with. He promised to make a collection of birds' eggs in the spring as a present for him when he should return. Then there was the old woman, Sailor Nan, who kept his memory green.

Lastly, there were my grandmother and myself. We knew not, however, where he was, or anything about him, nor could we guess what he was doing, or whither he had gone.

Twice in the year—namely, at Christmas or the New Year, and at Midsummer—I had letters from my parents, to which I duly replied. It was in May when Ralph ran away, so that they had three letters from me that year. When my Christmas letters arrived there was mention of our boy, but so strange a tale that we could not understand what to believe or what the thing might mean.

The letter told us that Ralph reached London safely in four or five weeks after leaving us, having walked all the way, save for such trifling lifts and helps as might be had for nothing on the road; he found out my father's shop; he gave him the letter; he slept in the house, and was hospitably entertained. In the morning he was taken by my father to the East India Company's great house in Cornhill, and left there by him to talk with a gentleman about the obtaining of a post in their service; that, the conversation finished, being dismissed by the gentleman with whom he had taken counsel, Ralph left the office. Then he disappeared, and was seen no more. Nor to the inquiries made was there any answer given or any news of him ascertained. 'So wicked is this unhappy town,' wrote my mother, 'that men are capable of

murdering even an innocent lad from the country for the sake of the silver buckles, or the very coat upon his back. Yet there are other ways in which he may have been drawn away. He loved not the thought of city life; he may have taken the recruiting sergeant's shilling, or he may have been pressed for a sailor and sent to sea; or, which Heaven forbid, he may have been decoyed into bad company, and now be in the company of rogues. Whatever the cause, he hath disappeared and made no sign. Yet he seemed a good and honest lad.'

So perplexed were we with the strange and unintelligible intelligence that, after turning it about in talk for a week, it was resolved that we would consult Mr. Carnaby in the matter. It would perhaps have been better if we had kept the thing to ourselves. For this gentleman, though he kindly considered the case, could do nothing to remove the dreadful doubt under which we lay, except that he recommended us to patience and resignation, virtues of which, Heaven knows! we women who stay at home must needs continually practise. We should, I say, have done better had we held our tongues, because Mr. Carnaby told the barber, who told the townsfolk one by one, and then it was whispered about that Ralph had joined the gipsies, according to some; or been pressed and sent to sea, according to others;

or had enlisted, according to others; with wild stories told in addition, born of imagination, idle or malignant, as that he had joined a company of common rogues and robbers; or—but I scorn to repeat these things. Everybody, however, at this juncture, remembered the wicked things said of the boy by his cousin. As for Mathew himself, overjoyed at the welcome news, which he received open-mouthed, so to speak, he went about calling all his acquaintance to witness that he had long since prophesied ruin and disaster to the boy, which, indeed, to the fullest extent, a lad so depraved as to horsewhip his own guardian richly deserved. As for coming back, he said, that was not likely, and indeed impossible, because he was already knocked on the head—Mathew was quite convinced of this—in some midnight brawl, or at least fallen so low that he would never dare to return among respectable people. These things we could not believe, yet they sank into our hearts and made us uneasy. For where could the boy be, and why did he not send us one letter, at least, to tell us what he had done, and how he had fared?

'Child,' said my grandmother, 'it is certain that Mathew does not wish his cousin to return. He bears malice in his heart against the boy, and he remembers that should he never come back the mill will be his own.' Already he began to

give himself the airs of the master, and to talk of selling a field here and a field there, and of improving the property, as if all was his.

'He will come back,' said the Fugleman. 'Brave hearts and lusty legs do not get killed. Maybe, he hath enlisted. Then he may have gone a soldiering to America, or somewhere in the world, and no doubt will get promotion—aye, corporal first, sergeant next, and perhaps be made Fugleman. Or, maybe, as your lady mother says, he hath been pressed, and is now at sea, so that he cannot write. But, wherever he is, be sure he is doing well. Wherefore, heart up!'

Well, to shorten the story, we got no news at all, and could never discover for many years what had become of the boy. When four years had passed by without a word or line from him, Mathew grew horribly afraid because Ralph's one-and-twentieth birthday drew near, and he thought the time was come when the heir would appear and claim his own. What preparations he made to receive him I know not. Perhaps a blunderbuss and a cup of poison. But the day passed, and there was no sign of Ralph. Then, indeed, Mathew became quite certain that he would no more be disturbed and that the mill was his own.

As for myself, I sat at home chiefly with my grandmother, who was now beginning to grow

old, yet brisk and notable still. There was a great deal to be done, and the days passed swiftly to industrious hands; yet not one so busy and not one so swift but I could find time to think and to pray for Ralph. As for diversions, for those who want them, there are plenty. Do not think that in our little north-country town we have any cause to envy the pleasures of town. Why, to begin with, there are the mummers at Christmas; all through the dark evenings the lads gamble at candle creel for the stable-lanterns; on New Year's Eve we sit up all night long and keep the fire burning—it is dreadful bad luck to borrow fire on a New Year's morning; in the summer there comes the fair; on Sunday afternoons, for the young men there is wrestling, with quarter-staff and cock-fighting. At harvest-time there is the March of the Kirn baby—

> The master's corn is ripe and shorn,
> We bless the day that he was born;
> Shouting a kirn—a kirn—ahoa!

with the feast afterwards and the cushion-dance, at which the old song of 'Prinkham Prankham' is always sung, and the girls are kissed, a proceeding which seems never to fail in causing the liveliest satisfaction to the men, though why they should wish to kiss young persons for whom they do not feel any affection, and perhaps, even any respect, passes my poor comprehension. I have

seen, on these occasions, a gentleman kiss a dairy-maid, and dissemble so well that one might say he liked it. Besides these amusements, the men had the excitement of the smuggling, whereof you will hear more presently.

To look back upon, in spite of these amusements, it was a long and dreary time of waiting. Yet still the Fugleman kept up my heart, and Sailor Nan swore, as if she was still captain of the foretop, that he would come home safe. I was young, happily, and youth is the time for hope. And about the end of the sixth year I had cause to think about other things, because my own misfortunes began.

I had long observed in the letters of my dear parents a certain difference, which constantly caused doubt and questioning; for my mother exhorted me continually in every letter to the practice of frugality, thrift, simple living, and the acquisition of housewifely knowledge, and, in short, all those virtues which especially adorn the condition of poverty. She also never failed to bid me reflect upon the uncertainty of human affairs and the instabilily of fortune; and every letter furnished examples of rich men becoming poor, and great ladies reduced to beg their bread. My grandmother bade me lay these things to heart, and I perceived that she was disturbed, and she would have written to my father to ask if

things were going ill, but for two reasons. The first was that she could neither read nor write, those arts not having been taught her in her childhood; and I testify that she was none the worse for want of them, but her natural shrewdness even increased, because she had to depend upon herself, and could not still be running to a book for guidance. The second reason was that the letters of my father, both to her and to myself, were full of glorious anticipation and confidence. Yes; while my mother wrote in sadness, he wrote in triumph; when she bade me learn to scour pots, he commanded me to study the fashions; when she prophesied disaster, he proclaimed good fortune. Thus, he ordered that I was to be taught whatever could be learned in so remote a town as Warkworth, and that especial care was to be taken in my carriage and demeanour, begging my grandmother to observe the deportment of Mistress Carnaby, and to bid me copy her as an example; for, he said, a city heiress not uncommonly married with a gentleman of good family, though impoverished fortunes; that some city heiresses had of late married noblemen; that as he had no son, nor any other child but myself, I would inherit the whole of his vast fortune (I thought how I could give it all to Ralph), and, therefore, I must study how to maintain myself in the position which I should

shortly occupy; that he was already of the Common Council, and looked before long to be made Alderman, after which it was but a step to Sheriff first and Lord Mayor afterwards; that he intended to build or buy a great house worthy of his wealth; and that he did not wish me to return home until such time as this house was in readiness, because, as one might truly say, his present dwelling in Cheapside, though convenient for his business and the place where his fortune was made, was but a poor place, quite unworthy of an heiress, and he wished that I should be seen nowhere until he had prepared a fitting place for my reception; that, in point of beauty, he hoped and doubted not that I should be able to set off and adorn the jewels and fine dresses which he designed presently to give me; and that he desired me especially to pay very particular attention not to seem quite rustical and country-bred, and to remember that the common speech of Northumberland would raise a laugh in London. With much more to the same effect.

I say not that my father wrote all this in a single letter, but in several, so that all these things became implanted in my mind, and both my grandmother and myself were, in spite of my mother's letters, firmly persuaded that we were already very rich and considerable people, and that my father was a merchant of the greatest

renown—already a Common Councilman, and shortly to be Alderman, Sheriff, and Lord Mayor —in the city of London. This belief was also held by our neighbours and friends, and it gave my grandmother, who was, besides, a lady of dignified manners, more consideration than she would otherwise have obtained, with the title of Madam, which was surely due to the mother of so great and successful a man.

Now the truth was this: my father was the most sanguine of men, and the most ready to deceive himself. He lived continually (if I may presume to say so without breaking the fifth commandment) in a fool's paradise. When he was a boy nothing would do for him but he must go to London, refusing to till the acres which would afterwards be his own, because he was ambitious, and ardently desired to be another Whittington. See the dangers of the common chap books, in which he had read the story of this great Lord Mayor! He so far resembled Whittington that he went up to London (by waggon from Newcastle) with little in his pocket, except a letter of recommendation from the then Vicar of Warkworth to his brother, at the time a glover in Cheapside. How he became apprentice—like Whittington—to this glover, how he fell in love —like Whittington—with his master's daughter, how he married her—like Whittington—and

inherited the business, stock, capital, goodwill, and all, may here only be thus briefly told; but by the death of his master he became actual and sole owner of a London shop, whereupon my poor father's brain being always full of visions, he was inflamed with the confidence that now, indeed, he had nothing to look for but the making of an immense fortune. Worse than this, he thought that the fortune would come of its own accord. How a man living in the city of London could make so prodigious a mistake I know not. Therefore he left the whole care of the business to his wife and his apprentices, and for his own part spent the day in coffee-houses or on 'Change, or wherever merchants and traders meet together. This made him full of great talk, and he presently proceeded to imagine that he himself was concerned in the great ventures and enterprises of which he heard so much; or, perhaps, because he could not actually have thought himself a merchant adventurer, he believed that before long he also should be embarking cargoes to the East and West Indies, running under convoy of frigates safe through the enemy's privateers. It was out of the profits of these imaginary cargoes that he was to obtain that vast wealth of which he continually thought and talked until, in the end, he believed that he possessed it. Meantime his poor wife, my mother, left in charge of the shop, and

with her household cares as well, found, to her dismay, that the respectable business which her father had made was quickly falling from them, as their old friends died, one by one, or retired from trade, and no new ones coming in their places; for, as I have been credibly informed, the business of a tradesman or merchant in London is so precarious and uncertain, that, unless it be constantly watched, pushed, nursed, encouraged, coaxed, fed, and flattered, it presently withers away and perishes.

For want of the master's presence, for lack of pushing and encouragement, the yearly returns of the shop grew less and less. No one knew this except my mother. It was useless to tell my father. If she begged his attention to the fact, he only said that business was, in the nature of things, fluctuating; that a bad year would be succeeded by a good year; that large profits had recently been made by traders to Calicut and Surinam, where he had designs of employing his own capital, and that ventures to Canton had of late proved extremely successful. Alas, poor man! he had no capital left, for now all was gone —capital, credit, and custom. Yet he still continued to believe that his shop, the shop which came to him with his wife, was bringing him, every year, a great and steady return, and that he was amassing a fortune.

One day—it was a Saturday evening in May—in the year seventeen hundred and seventy, six years after the flight of Ralph Embleton, when I was in my seventeenth year, and almost grown to my full height, I saw coming slowly along the narrow road which leads from the highway to Warkworth a country cart, and in it two persons, the driver walking at the horse's head. I stood at the garden-gate watching this cart idly, and the setting sun behind it, without so much as wondering who these persons might be, until presently it came slowly down the road, which here slopes gently to the river and the bridge, and pulled up in front of our gate. When the cart stopped a lady got quickly down and seized my hands.

'You are my Drusilla?' she asked, and without waiting for a reply, because she was my mother and knew I could be no other than her own daughter, she fell upon my neck in a passion of weeping and sobbing, saying that she knew I was her daughter dear, and that she was my most unhappy ruined mother. It was my father who descended after her. He advanced with dignified step and the carriage of one in authority. I observed that his linen and the lace of his ruffles were of the very finest, and his coat, though dusty, of the finest broadcloth. He seemed not to perceive my mother's tears; he

kissed me and gave me his blessing. He bade the carter, with majestic air, lead the 'coach'—he called the country cart a coach—and take great care of the horse, which he said was worth forty guineas if a penny; but the horse was a ten-year-old cart-horse, worth at most four guineas, as I knew very well, because I knew the carrier.

Amazed at this extraordinary behaviour, I led my parents to my grandmother, and then we presently learned the truth. My father, if you please, was ruined; he was a bankrupt; his schemes of greatness had come to nothing; his vast fortune lay in his imagination only; he had lost his wife's money and his own. He had returned to his native county, his old friends having clubbed together and made a little purse for him, and his creditors having consented to accept what they could get and to give him a quittance in full, because he was known to be a man of integrity; otherwise he might have been lodged in gaol, where many an unfortunate, yet honest, man lieth in misery.

The disaster was more than my father's brain could bear. Nothing more dreadful can happen to a merchant and one in trade than to become a bankrupt. To lose his money is bad, but many a man loses his all, yet does not become bankrupt, and so saves his credit. A merchant's credit

is for him what his honour is to a soldier, his piety to a divine, her virtue to a woman, his skill to a craftsman. My father, I say, could not bear it. First, as soon as he fairly understood what had happened, he fell into a lethargy, sitting in a chair all day in silence, and desiring nothing but to be left alone. After a while the lethargy changed into a restlessness, and he must needs be up and doing something—it mattered not what. Then the restlessness disappeared and he became again his old self, as cheerful, as sanguine, as confident, with no other change than a more settled dignity of bearing, caused by the belief, the complete delusion, that now his fortune was indeed made; that he possessed boundless wealth, and that he was going to leave London and to retire into the country, as many great merchants used to do, in order to enjoy it.

He was perfectly reasonable on all other points; he could talk on politics or on religion, on London matters, on the affairs of Warkworth, or on the interests of the farmers; but always on the assumption of his own wealth. The broad fields everywhere he believed to be his own. If he came with me, as he often did, when I milked the cow, fed the pigs and the chickens, made the bread, brewed the beer, or turned the churn, he laughed at what he was pleased to call the condescension of his heiress in doing this menial

work, and called me his pretty shepherdess. And sometimes he entertained me with stories of how his fortune was made. Chiefly I found his imagination ran upon Canton, with trade in tea and silk.

'It is very well known,' he would say, 'that those who venture in the Greek seas and the Levant run very heavy risks; they are more dangerous, my dear child, than many places much farther away. I considered the Levant trade carefully, before embarking my money in foreign ventures. I was always prudent, perhaps too prudent. Yet the end hath justified me. Eh, Drusilla, hath not the end justified me? Why, I have known a man on 'Change worth this day a plum—a round plum, child—and to-morrow not half that sum, by reason of losses in the treacherous Levant. But, alas! there are perils in every sea. Tempests and hurricanes arise; there are hidden rocks; there are fires at sea; ships are becalmed—all these things we call the Hand of God; there are also pirates everywhere; they lurk in the Mahometan ports of Morocco, Algiers, Tripoli, and Tunis; they hide in the fever-smitten harbours of Madagascar—but men born to be hanged laugh at fever; they abound in the West Indies and in the Narrow Seas. We are always at war with some great power, and therefore we have privateers to dread; these, my dear, are more desperate and

blood-thirsty villains even than your murderous pirates. And there is danger from mutiny aboard, whereby friends of my own—substantial men, mark you, on 'Change—have lost many a noble ship and precious cargo. We on 'Change think nothing of these chances; we are on the mountains one day and in the depths the next. Yet, like the good old country to which we belong, we weather the storm, and in the end grow rich. Rich? Drusilla, my child, we grow enormously rich. The Earl of Northumberland himself, with all his acres, is not so rich as your father.'

My mother spoke of him, when he was not present, with a bitterness which grieved me sore. But I knew not the trouble she had had, and the long anticipation of this trouble. It appeared, indeed, as if a sound, though modest, business, with the certainty of a competence, had been thrown away and wasted for want of a little—only a little forethought and care. My father, at the best, was only a simple glover with a small shop and two apprentices. What could a poor lad from Northumberland expect more? All that a woman can do my mother had done. But in trade a woman can do but little. She can serve, but she cannot go about and make trade—she cannot persuade Merchant Adventurers to load their ships with her wares. Yet, even with the memory of her wrongs, and her ruined hopes, she was always

gentle and forbearing in the presence of her afflicted husband, careful to keep him happy in his delusion, and tender with him, so that he should never feel the mischief he had done.

As for our means, I dared not ask. But presently I learned that all we had was the annuity of forty pounds a year, which would terminate with my grandmother's death, the cottage in which we lived, and a slender stock of money, I knew not how much, in my mother's hands.

Alas! this was the end of my splendid hopes —of my father's triumphant letters! I was indeed an heiress!

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE LETTER AT LAST.

One must accept without murmuring the ordinances of Providence. Murmuring avails nothing, and cannot restore things lost. The Hand which gives also takes away. The loss of that fortune, which I knew only by hearsay, and expected without eagerness, affected me but little in comparison with the burden of two more to keep upon our forty pounds a year. I saw clearly that I must for henceforth rise early and work late, and no more eat any bread of idleness. We had a servant, but we now sent her away, my mother and I doing all the house-work. In addition, I fed the poultry and milked the cow.

The good old Fugleman came every day as soon as he heard of our misfortunes and understood that I could no more go to the castle of an afternoon, and became of very great service indeed, for he kept the garden for us, and talked with my father, who, to be sure, was best out of the house, where he was only in our way. He

also—which was kind of him—took the management of the pigs. And I must also confess my great obligations to Mrs. Carnaby, who, understanding the straits into which we were fallen, was so good as to send me and persuade other ladies of this part of the county to send me fine work to do, by means of which I earned a little money, which went into the common purse and was useful. My mother wept to think that I must rise at five, and, after doing the house-work and the out-door work, making butter and sending it away to be sold with eggs and cream-cheese and other little things—it was not much we got, but something—to be compelled to sit down in the afternoon to my needle, and work till nine at night. But I was a tall strong girl; work did me no harm. I should have been happy but that I saw my grandmother grow daily weaker. She sickened and began to fail when she saw her son, of whom she was so proud, return a beggar to his native county, and when she heard his poor deluded talk. A grievous sight it was to see the poor old lady, once so strong and active, sit feeble in her chair by the fireside, while her sad eyes followed her son as he proudly walked to and fro in the room and told the tale of his investments and his wealth. Sometimes I noted how my mother looked wistfully upon this spectacle of age and decay, and saw how her mouth worked and

her lips moved, and knew well that she was saying to herself, 'When she dies, what next?' And then I was fain to go away into the garden, where they could not hear me, and cry over troubles of the present and fears of the future which seemed hard to be borne.

'Don't cry, Miss Drusy'—yet the good old Fugleman looked as if he, too, would willingly shed a tear—'don't cry; think to yourself that when the boy comes home all will go well again. Merry as a wedding-bell shall we be then.'

'Ah, when—when?'

We had two visitors who came often. One of them was his Worship Mr. Cuthbert Carnaby. He came, he said, in order to profit by the experience and conversation of my father.

'I know, child,' he said, 'and greatly commiserate, the disorder of his brain, yet I cannot but marvel at the extent of his knowledge, the justice of his remarks, and the weight of his opinion. It is indeed a marvel to me that one so richly endowed by Providence with understanding should have so conspicuously failed in the business of his life, which was to grow rich.'

I take pleasure in quoting the testimony of so eminent an authority to the great qualities possessed by my unfortunate father, and it did one good to see them walking in the garden, my father bearing himself with the deference due to

a gentleman of good old family, yet expecting equal deference to himself as a man of great success and wealth, and both arguing on the politics and the conduct of affairs with as much gravity as two plenipotentiaries or ambassadors extraordinary.

Strange it was, indeed, to think that one was mad who could converse so rationally, with such just estimate of things, with so true a knowledge of their proportion, so vast a fund of information as to the state of trade all over the world, the value of gold, the balance of profit, the growth of industries; yea, and even the power and prospects of foreign states, with their wants and their dangers. Or that one could be mad who could set forth with such lucidity the foundation of our Christian faith, and the arguments for the doctrines taught in our churches. He was not only sane, but he was a man worth listening to on all subjects—save one. For he was fully possessed with the idea that he was as wealthy as he had ever desired to be. His poor brain was turned, indeed, on this point, and after a while I thought little of it, because we became accustomed to it, and because it seemed a harmless craze. Yet it was not harmless, as you will hear. Indeed, even an innocent babe in arms may be made the instrument of mischief in the hands of a wicked man.

Our second visitor was Mathew Humble. He

came first, he said, to pay his respects to my father. Then he began to come with great regularity. But I perceived soon, for I was no longer a child, but already a woman, that he had quite another object in view, for he cast his eyes upon me in such a way as no woman can mistake. Even to look upon those eyes of his made me turn sick with loathing. Why, if this man had been another Apollo for beauty I would not have regarded him; and so far was he from an Apollo that a fat and loathsome Satyr more nearly resembled him.

He was already three or four and thirty, which I, being seventeen, regarded as a very great age indeed; and most Northumbrian folk are certainly married and the fathers of children already tall before that time.

He was a man who made no friends, and lived alone with his sister Barbara. No girl at all, so far as I know, could boast of having received any attention from him; he was supposed to care for nothing except money and strong drink. Every evening he sat by himself in the room which overlooks the river, with account-books before him, and drank usquebaugh. But he loved brandy as well, or Hollands, or rum, or indeed anything which was strong. And being naturally short of stature he was grown fat and gross, with red hanging cheeks, which made his

small eyes look smaller and more pig-like, a double chin, and a nose which already told a tale of deep potations, so red and swollen was it. What girl of seventeen could regard with favour —even if there were no image of a brave and comely boy already impressed upon her heart— such a man as this, a mere tosspot and a drinker? And, worst of all, a secret and solitary drinker— a gloomy drinker.

It was strange that, about the time when Ralph's disappearance was first heard of, rumours ran about the town that perhaps the mill would turn out, after all, to be the property of Mathew Humble; that these rumours were revived at the approach of Ralph's twenty-first birthday; and that again, when Mathew first began his approaches to me, the rumour was again circulated. By the help of the Fugleman I traced these rumours to the barber; and, still with his help— because every man must be shaved, and, while being shaved, must talk—I traced these to none other than Mathew himself. He had, then, some object to gain; I knew not what at the time. Later on I discovered that his design was to make it appear—should Ralph ever return—that I had taken him for a husband when I thought he was the actual master and owner of all; for I believe he allowed himself no doubt as to the result of his offers. Doth it not seem as if the uglier, the

older, the less attractive a man is, whether in person or in mind, the more certain he becomes of conquering a woman's heart?

The rumour on this occasion was more certain and distinct than before. It was now stated that Mr. Embleton was discovered to have made a later will, which had been proved, and was ready to be produced, if necessary; that in this will the testator, after deploring the badness of heart manifested by his nephew Ralph, devised the whole of his property to his nephew Mathew. The barber, for his part, had no doubt of the truth of this report; but those who asked Mathew whether it was true, received mysterious answers, as that time would show; that in this world no one should be certain of anything; that many is the slip between cup and lip; that should an occasion arise the truth of the story would be tested; such oracles as incline the hearers to believe all that has been said—and more. Barbara, his sister, for her own part, showed great willingness to answer any questions which might be put to her. Bnt she knew little; her brother, she said, was a close man, who sat much alone and spoke little.

And then the Fugleman told me a very strange story indeed, and one which seemed to bode no good to any of us. By this time I so regarded Mathew that I could not believe he

could do or design aught but evil. This was wrong, but he was most certainly a man of very evil disposition.

His own private business, the Fugleman told me—this was nothing in the world, as I very well knew, but the snaring of rabbits, hares, partridges, and other game on the banks of the river—led him sometimes past Morwick Mill, in the evening or late at night. There was a room in the mill—the same room in which Mathew was vanquished and beaten—the window of which looked out upon the river, which is here a broad and shallow brook. The bank rises steep on the other side, and is clothed with thick hanging woods in which no one ever walked except the Fugleman, and he, for those purposes I have just mentioned, always alone and after sundown. Now his eyes were like unto the eyes of a hawk; they knew not distance; they could see, quite far off, little things as well as great things; and the Fugleman saw, night after night, that Mathew Humble was sitting locked up in his room, engaged in writing or copying something. I believe that if the Fugleman had known how to read, he would have read the writing even across the river. Unhappily, he had never learned that art. Mathew was making a copy, the Fugleman said, of some other document. But what that document was he could not tell. It was something on

large sheets of paper, and in big handwriting. He wrote very slowly, comparing word for word with the papers which he seemed copying. Once when there was a noise as of someone at the door, he huddled all the papers together, and bundled them away in a corner quickly and with an affrighted air. He was therefore doing something secret, which means something wicked. What could it be?

'Little he thinks,' said the Fugleman, 'that Master Ralph is sure to come home and confound his knavish tricks, and trip up his heels for him. Ah, I think I see him now, in lace ruffles and good broadcloth, walking up the street with a fine City Madam on his arm.'

I should have been very well contented with the lace ruffles and good broadcloth—indeed, I asked for nothing better—but I wanted no fine City Madam at the mill.

Later on I learned what this thing was which he took so long to copy, and which gave him so much anxiety. But it was like a fire-ship driven back by the wind among the vessels of those who sent it forth.

One morning when I was busy in the kitchen with household work, and my mother was engaged upon the family sewing, Mathew came and begged to have some conversation with her. He said that, first of all, he was fully acquainted with her

circumstances, and the unhappy outlook before her, when my grandmother should die and leave us all without any income at all; that, being of a compassionate heart, he was strongly minded to help them; and that the best way, as well as he could judge, would be to make her daughter Drusilla his wife. This done, he would then see that their later years would be attended with comfort and the relief of all anxiety.

At first my mother did not reply. She had no reason to love Mathew, whose unkindness to his ward was well known to her. Again, she had still some remains of family pride left—you do not destroy a woman's pride by taking away her money. She thought, being the daughter of a well-to-do London citizen, that her child should look higher than a man who had nothing in the world of his own but thirty acres of land, although he lived at the mill and pretended to be its owner. And she very truly thought that the man was not in person likely to attract so young a girl as myself. But she spoke him fair. She told him that I was young as yet, too young to know my own mind, and that perhaps he had better wait. He replied that he was not young, for his own part, and that he would not wait. Then she told him that she should not, certainly, force the inclinations of her daughter, but that she would speak to me about him.

She opened the subject to me in the evening. No sooner did I understand that Mathew had spoken for me than I threw myself upon my knees to my mother, and implored her with many tears and protestations not to urge me to accept his suit. I declared with vehemence, that if there were no other man in the world, I could not accept Mathew Humble. I reminded her of his behaviour towards Ralph. I assured her that I believed him to be one who sat drinking by himself, and a plotter of evil, a man with a hardened heart and a dead conscience.

Well, my mother shed tears with me, and said that I should not be married against my will; that Mathew was not a good man, and that she would bid him, not uncourteously, go look elsewhere. This she did, thanking him for the honour he had proposed.

For some reason, perhaps because he did not really wish to marry me, perhaps because he had not thoroughly laid out the scheme of marrying me to revenge himself upon Ralph, Mathew gave me a respite for the time, though I went in great terror lest he might pester my mother or myself. Perhaps, which I think more likely, he trusted to the influence of poverty and privation, and was contented to wait till these should make me submissive to his will.

However that may be, he said nothing more

concerning love, and continued his visits to my father, in whose conversation he took so great a pleasure. Oh, villain!

Things were in this posture, I being in the greatest anxiety and fear that something terrible was going before long to happen to us, when a most joyful and unexpected event happened.

It was in the month of May, seven years since Ralph's flight—like the followers of Mohammed, I reckoned the years from the Flight—that this event happened.

The event was this, that the Fugleman had a letter sent to him—the first letter he ever received in his life.

I saw the post-boy riding down the road early in the afternoon; he passed by the house of Mr. Carnaby, where he sometimes stopped, past our cottage, where he never stopped because there was nobody who wrote letters to us, and over the bridge, his horse's hoofs clattering under the old gateway. I thought he was going to the vicarage, but he left that on his right and rode straight up the street, blowing his horn as he went. I wondered, but had no time to waste in wonder, who was going to get a letter in that part of the town. The letter, in fact, was for no other than the Fugleman.

Half an hour later the Fugleman, who had been at work in the garden all the morning,

came down the town again, and asked me—with respect to her ladyship, my mother—if I would give him five minutes' talk. With him was sailor Nan, because the thing was altogether so strange that he could not avoid telling her about it, and she came with him, curious as a woman, though bold and brave as becomes an old salt.

'Tis a strange thing,' said the Fugleman, turning the unopened letter over and over in his hand; 'tis a strange thing; here is a letter which tells me I know not what—comes from I know not where. I have paid 3*s.* 8*d.* for it. A great sum. I doubt I was a fool. It may mean money, and it may mean loss.'

'Burn it, and ha' done,' said Sailor Nan. 'Tis from some land shark. Burn the letter.'

'I am sixty, or mayhap seventy years of age. Sixty, I must a-be. Yes; sure and certain, sixty. Yet never a letter in all my days before.'

Now, which is very singular, not the least suspicion in our minds as to the writer of the letter.

'Is it,' I asked, 'from a cousin or a brother?'

'Cousin?' he repeated, with the shadow of a smile across his stiff lips. 'Why, I never had a father or a mother, to say nothing of a brother or a cousin. When I first remember anything, I was running in the streets with other boys. We stole our breakfast, we stole our dinner, and we stole

our supper. Where are they all now, those little rogues and pickpockets, my companions? Hanged, I doubt not. What but hanging can have come to them? But as for me, by the blessing of the Lord, I was enlisted in the 14th Line, and after a few hundreds taken mostly by three dozen doses, which now are neither here nor there, and are the making of a lad, I was flogged into a good soldier, and so rose as was due to merit. A hearty three dozen, now and then, laid on with a will in the cool of the morning, works miracles. Not such a regiment in the service as the 14th. And why? Because the colonel knew his duty and did it without fear or favour, and the men were properly trounced. Good comrades all, and brave boys. And where are they? Dead, I take it; beggars, some; fallen in action, some; broke, some; in comfortable berths, like me, some. If all were living, who would there be to send me a letter, seeing there wasn't a man in all the regiment who could write?'

Strange that not one of us even then guessed the truth.

It was a great letter, thick and carefully sealed, addressed to 'Fugleman Furlong, At his room in the Castle of Warkworth, Northumberland, England.' It came from foreign parts, and the paper was not only stained, but had a curious fragrance.

I broke the seal and tore open the covering of the letter. Within was another packet. Oh, Heavens! It was addressed to 'Drusilla Hetherington, care of the Fugleman, to be forwarded without delay. Haste—post haste!'

And then I knew without waiting to open the letter that it would be from none other than Ralph. It must be from Ralph. After all these years, we were to hear once more from Ralph. I stood pale and trembling, nor could I for some moments even speak. At last I said:

'Fugleman—Nan—this letter is addressed to me. It is, I verily believe, from Ralph Embleton. Wait a little, while I read it.'

'Read it—read it!' cried the old man.

Could I—ah! merciful Heaven—could I ever forget the rapture, the satisfied yearning, the blissful content, the gratitude, with which I read that sweet and precious letter? They waited patiently; even the rude and coarse old woman refrained from speech while I read page after page. They said nothing though they saw the tears falling down my face, because they knew that they were tears of happiness.

After seven long years, my Ralph was talking to me as he used to talk. I knew his voice, I recognised his old imperious way, I saw that he had not changed. As if he would ever change!

When I had finished and dried my tears, they begged me to read his letter to them.

'My dear, dear Girl'—I told them that I could not, indeed, read all, but that I would read them what I could; and this was the beautiful beginning, in order that I should know at the outset, so thoughtful he was, and for fear of my being anxious on the point, that he loved me still, and had never forgotten me. 'My dear, dear Girl,—It is now six years since I bade you farewell at your garden-gate and started upon my journey to London. Your father has doubtless told you how I presented myself and with what kindness he received me. I am very sure that you have not forgotten me, and I hope that you will rejoice to hear of my good fortune'—Hope, indeed! Could he not be sure?—'I have no doubt also that he hath informed you of the strange good fortune which befell me after he left me at the East India Company's House, of which I told him by letter and special messenger, to whom I gave, to ensure speed and safe delivery, one shilling.' (But it would appear that this wicked messenger broke his word, and took the shilling, but did nothing for it—a common thief, who deserved to be hanged, like many another no more wicked than himself. Oh! what punishment too great for this breach of trust, small as it

seemed! See, now, what a world of trouble was caused by that little theft.) 'It was truly by special Providence that, while Mr. Silvertop talked with me, the great Captain who won the Battle of Plassy should have been standing near and should have overheard what passed. When I was bidden go my ways for a foolish boy (because I did not wish to be a writer) and waste his time no longer, I was much cast down, for now I began to fear that I must, like the most of mankind, take what was assigned to me by Providence rather than what I would like. And I could plainly see that there remained only one choice for me; namely, I must return to the hated rule of my cousin who would keep me as a plough-boy as long as he could, or I must betake me to the task of sweeping out and serving a shop. And yet, what shop? But who would employ me? Therefore, I hung my head and stood irresolute without the Company's house. Now, presently, the gentleman whom I had seen within came forth with another officer, brave in scarlet. He saw me standing sadly beside the posts, and inspired by that noble generosity which has always distinguished this great man, he clapped his hand upon my shoulder.

'"So," he said, "you are the lad who loves a sword better than a pen?"

'"If it please your honour," I replied.

'"A sword means peril to life and limb," he said sternly; "he who goes a fighting in India must expect hard fare, rough sleeping, rude knocks. He must ever be on the watch against treachery. He must meet duplicity with equal cunning. He must obey blindly; he must never ask why; if he is sent to die like a rat in a hole, he must go without murmur or question. What! you think—do you?—that to carry a sword is to flaunt a scarlet coat before the ladies of St. James's?"

'"Nay, sir, with respect. I have read the lives of soldiers. I would willingly take the danger for the sake of the honour. But alas! I must stay at home and sweep a shop."

'"What is thy birth, boy?"

'I told him that, and satisfied him on other points, including the reason of my flight, in which I trust that I was no more than truthful. Then he said:

'"I am Lord Clive," and paused as if to know whether I had heard of him.

'You may be sure I was astonished, but I quickly doffed my hat and made him my best country-bred bow.

'"My lord," I said, "we have heard, even in Northumberland, of Plassy."

'"Good! I went to India as a writer—a miserable quill-driving writer. Think of that.

What one man has done another may do. Now, boy, I sail this day for India. There will be more fighting, a great deal more fighting. If you please you shall go as a cadet with me. But there is no time to hesitate: I sail this day. Choose between the shop-sweeping and the musket. You will fight in the ranks at first, but if you behave well the sword will come after. Choose—peace and money-scraping at home like these smug-faced fat citizens," he swept his hand with lordly contempt, "or fighting and poverty, and perhaps death abroad. Choose."

'"I humbly thank your lordship," I said, "I will follow you if you will condescend to take me."

'Then he bade me go straight to Limehouse Pool, where I should find the ship at anchor. I was to take a note to the purser who would give me an outfit.

'Thus, my dear Drusilla, did I find my fortune and sail to foreign parts under as brave and great a captain as this country will ever see.

'Our voyage lasted eleven months. There were three hundred raw recruits on board, mostly kidnapped or inveigled under false pretences by crimps and the scoundrels of Wapping. When they were first paraded, they were as beggarly-looking a lot as you would wish to see, ragged,

dirty, mutinous, and foul-mouthed. Yet in a couple of months, by daily drill, by good food and sea air, by moderate rations of rum, by sound flogging, by the continual discipline of the boatswain's rope's-end and the sergeant's rattan, the regimental supple-jack, and the ship's cat-o'-nine-tails, they became as promising soldiers as one would wish. As for me, I stood with them in the drill and did my best. Of course I could not expect his lordship to notice so humble a cadet as myself, but one evening, when we were near the end of our voyage, he sent for me and gave me a glass of wine, and kindly bade me be patient and of good cheer, because, he said, young gentlemen of merit and courage would be sure to find opportunities for distinction.'

Ralph then went on to describe the life of a soldier in India, and to tell me—but this I leave out for fear of being tedious—how he received his commission and how he got promotion. It is sufficient to say that at the time he wrote, after six years of service, he held the commission of a captain. Nor was that all. He had been able to render such signal service to a certain Rajah, that this prince, who was not ungrateful, and hoped, besides, for more such services, took him one day into his treasure-house and bade him help himself to all if he pleased.

'My dear,' he continued, 'I knew not that

the world contained so much treasure. Yet this Rajah is but a petty prince, and his wealth is as nothing compared with that of many others. There were diamonds in bags, uncut, whose worth I know not, and diamonds in rings, sword-handles, and women's gauds; there were rubies, emeralds, sapphires, turquoises, opals, and all kinds of precious stones strung rudely on common string as if they were but pebbles. There were also gold and silver vessels of all kinds, and there were casks full of gold coins. As I took out a handful I saw that many of them were ancient, with Greek characters, perhaps left in this country by that great soldier Alexander. When I had surveyed these wonders I thanked him, and said that I should not presume to take so much as a single gold coin from his treasure, but that if it should please his Highness to offer me a present, I should accept it with gratitude, provided it was not too costly. He laughed at these words, and when we came away I was so loaded with gold that I fancied myself already a rich man.

'Since this event it hath pleased Lord Clive to issue an order which prohibits officers from accepting henceforth any presents at all from the native princes. I cannot but feel grateful that the order was not issued before my own good fortune. Doubtless his Excellency hath good

reasons for this order, which places the military service at a disadvantage compared with the writers, who have great opportunities of making fortunes; and I cannot but think that it is a more noble thing to win a fortune at the point of the sword, than by such arts as are daily practised by the writers and civil servants of the Company. There are many Englishmen, and many Frenchmen as well—but we are driving them out of the country—who have become rich in the military service of the Indian princes; yet I shall not exchange my present masters so long as the merchants—who think nothing of glory or of this country, yet a great deal of their dividends—perceive that it is for their safety, as well as for their credit, to extend their power; and I have a reasonable hope that the good fortune which hath hitherto attended me may continue, so that I may return to my native country, if only in my old age, amply provided. As regards the climate, I have as yet experienced no great inconvenience from the heat. The natives have learned to fear an Englishman rather than to love him, which is, methinks, the thing we should most desire when we have to rule over people as ignorant of the Christian virtues, although not barbarous, like the naked blacks, but a most ingenious, dexterous, and skilful people, and of subtle intellect, yet slothful of body, lovers

of rest, deceivers, regardless of truth, for ever scheming plots and contriving subtleties, and more cruel to prisoners than the Spanish Inquisition. The best amongst them are followers of Mahomet, who make faithful servants and good soldiers. It is a country where the ambition and jealousy of princes are continually causing fresh wars to be undertaken, and where a European may lead a life of adventure to his heart's content.'

I was reading, as I have said, this letter aloud in presence of my two faithful friends. Now when I spoke of the drill on board, and the sergeant's rattan, and the regimental supple-jack, the Fugleman drew himself upright and shouldered the garden-spade, because there was no pike at hand; and when I read of the bo's'n's rope's-end and the ship's cat-o'-nine-tails, Sailor Nan cocked her hat and stood with feet apart and hands upon her hips, and began, but in a whisper, to murmur strange sea-oaths; and when I read the account of the fight in which Ralph's courage saved this grateful Rajah—it was a most dreadful battle, in which hundreds of brave fellows and treacherous Hindoos were killed, so that to read it made one's heart cease to beat—the Fugleman, carried beyond himself, executed capers with the spade which signified little to my ignorant eyes, but which were, I believe, the movements with which

the trained soldier attacks with the bayonet, and the old sailor with a mop-stick cut down her thousands, mighty curses rolling softly from her lips like distant thunder.

If the beginning of the letter was delightful, judge how beautiful was the end:

'I have now, my dear, told you all that concerns myself. I suppose you have long since left Warkworth and gone to live with your parents, to whom I beg to convey my respects and best wishes. If, among your rich friends and the gaieties of the fashion'—the 'gaieties!'—'you have found lovers (as, to be sure, you must) and a husband, or one whom you have distinguished with your favour and regard, you will remember that I shall ever be to you as a brother; for, lover or brother, I can never cease to love——'

'A good lad!' said the Fugleman.

'As ever trod the deck!' said the sailor. 'Go on, Miss Drusy.'

'And I am sure that you have grown up as tall and as beautiful as an angel.'

'She has,' said the Fugleman.

'Taller, ye lubber,' said the sailor, 'and more beautiful an angel than ever I clapped eyes on, nor never a Peg nor a Poll at Sheerness or Deptford or the Common Hard to show a candle alongside her. What's even a frigate in full sail compared with a lovely woman?'

This enthusiasm for the loveliness of her own sex (unusual among old women), I put down to her naval experiences and familiarity with sailor talk, and went on quickly; because, if Ralph loved to flatter me, I ought not to let these poor people follow his example. An angel! But men are so. They cannot give enough; they lavish their praises, as they lavish the very fruits of their labours, upon the women they love. We women measure our gifts—except to our boys. I pass over, therefore, the fond words of a lover about blue eyes and curling hair, and Nymphs in cool grots, and soft smiles and other imaginary gifts and graces, all of which my listeners applauded, nodding their heads. Oh! he could say what he pleased, he could imagine all the perfections, so that he continued to tell me, as he did in this letter, how he thought upon me daily, and loved me always more and more.

'As for the address of this letter,' he said, 'I know not where in London or elsewhere your father may now reside; therefore I forward it to the care of the Fugleman, with request that he will send it to you at the earliest opportunity, and by a safe hand. Will you, in return, inform him of my continued esteem and friendship?'

'"Esteem and friendship!"' repeated the Fugleman. 'This from a Captain! Was ever such a boy?'

'And if you find an opportunity, tell Sailor Nan that half her fortune has come true.'

She replied that at her time of life it was odd if she couldn't tell the fortune of a boy, and as for the present cruise, it was bound to be a fair-weather voyage.

Finally, my brave lover begged me to write to him and tell him all that had happened since his departure, and subscribed himself, with much love, Ralph Embleton.

When we had read the letter twice, which took us all the afternoon, and cost me three hours' sewing, we took counsel together. First they were both for telling it about the town, and having a bonfire, with the ringing of the church bells in a triple bob major, but I was of opinion that it would be best to keep our own counsel for awhile. Therefore I bound them both to secresy and silence. I would let Mathew alone, and watch him. He should not know anything, not even that Ralph was alive and prosperous; and had I kept this resolution, because my two friends were loyal and secret as the grave, it would have been better in the end for all of us, and much better for Mathew. But, as the wise man said, 'Death and life are in the power of the tongue.'

## CHAPTER VII.

### MATHEW'S FRIENDLY OFFER.

THIS letter made me, from one of the most unhappy of girls, the most joyous. The immediate prospect of poverty—for the Dame declined daily—the hard work which began at daylight and ended at bed-time, the certain knowledge that Mathew was not satisfied with a simple refusal—these things, which had before filled my mind with terror, now appeared like the imaginary spectres of the night, which cease to alarm when the day has dawned. To me it was more than the dawn of day; it was the uprising of a glorious sun of love and hope. Ralph loved me; Ralph was well, prosperous, and in high esteem; Ralph was already wealthy; Ralph would come home, and all things would be well, whatever might happen at the moment. Yet this I could not tell to any. Mathew was not to know; my poor old grandmother was too old now, and too failing of mind and body, to care for earthly things; my father had clean forgotten the boy; my mother

would not greatly care to know; nor would it soothe her anxieties to feel that we had a protector separated from us by the rolling seas and by a voyage of ten months or more. What good would be his far-off treasures to us, she would have asked, when what we want is beef for the pot and bread for the board? As for my father's madness, it increased every day, so that now our cottage was a palace indeed, every meal was a banquet, and the small beer of my brewing was champagne, port, Malaga, or Imperial Tokay. But Mathew was too much with him, and it made me uneasy to observe how he complimented my father on his wisdom, his resolution, and his wonderful success.

'In all respects, madam,' he said to my mother, 'I find your husband most sensible and full of sound judgment. I have taken his counsel, of late, in many private matters of importance.'

'Then the Lord help you!' said my mother, sharply.

'What if he does exaggerate his private fortune?' Mathew went on. 'It is a failing with many persons concerned in trade.'

'If you mean this in kindness, sir,' said my mother, 'I thank you humbly for your good opinion of my poor distraught husband. If you mean it in mockery, you are a most cruel man.'

'Indeed, madam,' he replied, bowing, 'pray believe that I mean it in kindness.'

He had no kindness at all in his nature. He designed these words to cover his iniquitous purpose.

So he continued to come and go, and to walk with my father in the garden, and whatever wild things my father said he would accept gravely as if they were indeed words of wisdom. No one, except myself, suspected him of sinister designs, and my father disclosed to him the whole prodigious extent of his madness, so that I could have cried with shame and humiliation, Mathew knowing well, as all the world knew by this time, that we were little better than the poorest in the parish.

'The world, sir,' the poor gentleman would say, with a lofty air, 'has yet to learn how great a benefactor a simple London citizen may be. There have been many benefactors. I acknowledge their greatness. But wait, sir, until my will is opened and read. To you, friend Mathew, I have bequeathed a poor ten thousand pounds—no more.'

'Oh, sir!' He bowed and spread his hands. 'This is indeed goodness.'

'It is the duty of a rich citizen to discover merit and to reward it—the plain duty. I am a London citizen, and am perhaps more proud of

this position than becomes a Christian. The bulk of my fortune I have left to my daughter, whom I design in marriage for some great nobleman. But I have not forgotten the poor of my native parish, Mathew—no, no; and you will find, when my will is read, that schools, a hospital, marriage-portions for the girls, and apprentice-money for the boys, will attest my remembrance of this place.'

'Sir,' said Mathew, with a grin of contempt, 'you will be a benefactor indeed.'

Now, before I answered Ralph's letter, which I kept for more than a month in my bosom, reading it every day when I could snatch a moment, Mathew came to me, and after a little preamble, of which I am going to tell you, re-opened the distasteful subject of his courtship. I was in the garden, gathering herbs for a mint-julep, when I saw him standing at the garden-gate. He looked so jocund, he smiled so pleasantly, and he wore so self-satisfied an air, that I was quite certain some evil thing had happened.

'Drusilla,' he said, 'I have heard certain intelligence. You may depend upon its truth, which is confirmed in every particular. I think that you should be the first to hear it, sad though it be, yet what I could not but expect.'

'I suppose,' I said with a laugh, because I knew that he was about to invent some wicked

falsehood, 'I suppose you have got something to tell me about Ralph, whom your cruel conduct drove out into the world?'

'Nay,' he replied, looking darkly, yet with a smile, 'you may say what you please; you cannot offend me. I have just come from Alnwick, where I sold four fat beasts. At the inn I fell in with a strolling player, and talked with him over a glass about his wandering life. Presently I asked him whether he had seen, anywhere upon his travels, especially in places where actors like himself, with profligates and thieves resort, such a lad as Ralph. It is wonderful to relate that he remembered seeing the boy at a place called Grantham. It was about six or seven years ago. The reprobate lad was making love—actually making love—to a young actress. When my informant came across the party again, Ralph had left them.'

At first I concluded that this was sheer fabrication, but afterwards gleaned that it was to a certain extent true; that is, that Ralph had made the acquaintance of the actress and her family on his way to London; but there was no love-making. How could there be, when he was already in love with me? And what follows was pure and clumsy invention.

'He wandered about with them playing and acting,' Mathew went on, 'for four or five years.

Then he deserted them, or was turned out in disgrace—it matters not which—and, I am ashamed to say'—but he looked delighted—'took to the road, where he is now known everywhere as Black Ralph, or Bloody Ralph.'

'Are you quite sure of what you say?'

'As sure as I am that he will be hanged as soon as he is caught.'

I know not by what means Mathew persuaded himself, if indeed he did persuade himself, that Black Ralph, who was a notorious highwayman about this time, and practised his wicked calling upon the York Road, was Ralph Embleton. Yet he made so certain of it that he told—under strict promise of secresy—the barber, who told everybody, also under promise of secresy, and it was noised abroad that the distinction of giving birth to the most bloodthirsty villain in England belonged to Warkworth, and many people advised Mathew to go armed, and to provide his house with a loaded blunderbuss, a bull-dog, and a few man-traps, because his cousin would probably visit him with intent to murder as well as rob.

'I suppose,' Mathew went on to me, 'that you will now give up thinking of that young yagabond. A pretty girl like you should throw your thoughts higher. Why, though your father's a beggar, as one may say——'

'He is not a beggar, so long as my grandmother lives.'

'Perhaps that will not be much longer,' he replied with an ugly grin. 'Now, Drusilla, listen to me. You know that I've set my fancy upon you. I've been waiting just till you grew up, and then for—for one or two little things to ripen which have now ripened and turned out pretty well. Now that everything is ready, there is no reason to wait any longer. Ralph being a highwayman and certain to be hanged——'

'Then, Mathew,' I replied, 'I will wait until he is hanged, and then you can talk to me again if you like. Now, go away, and leave me to my work.'

He went away for that time, and next morning his sister Barbara came. She was at first mysterious about sudden changes of fortune, unexpected reverses, and the judgments of angered Heaven. These things I did not then consider as pertaining to myself, because I knew not how I had especially angered Heaven, more, that is, than thoughtless youth may do at any time, and yet obtain forgiveness by daily prayer. She also added a certain exhortation to kiss the rod, which I pass over. Then she launched into praises of her brother. He was most industrious, she said; up early and to work before daybreak; he was full of religion, which surprised me very much to hear; he was thrifty and had already saved a

large sum of money—this, I found afterwards, was false; he could provide a comfortable home, and happy, indeed, she added, would be the woman on whom his choice should fall. Added to this that he was no longer young and scatter-brained, but arrived at the sober age of three or four and thirty; and that Mathew's wife would have the advantage of her own society, help, example, and admonition.

I told her that Mathew had got his answer, and that I thought it hard that a woman could not be supposed to know her own mind in so important a matter.

'What is your answer, then?' she asked.

'I will talk to Mathew on the subject again,' I replied, 'when Ralph is hanged, since this is a thing which both you and he desire so vehemently.'

Two days afterwards Mathew himself met me as I was on my way to the castle. He begged me to give him another hearing, and, as I could not refuse so simple a thing, I led him by the path below the castle to the bank of the river, where he could talk at his ease and unheard.

First it was the same story. Would I forget the young villain and marry him? He was so much in love with me, that he would not say as some men—not so rich, mind you, as himself—would say, that I might go hang myself in my

garters for aught he cared. He would forgive my disrespect and impudence; he would forget the past altogether; people should see that he was of a truly noble and forgiving disposition; he would give me another chance, so great was his generosity. Very well, then, would I marry him?

I replied very gravely, that he had already received his answer. When Ralph was hanged, and not before, I would listen to him. Then I asked him seriously why he thought so meanly of me as to try this trumped-up story about play-actors and highwaymen upon me, and reminded him of what a truly wicked disposition he must be, thus to glory and delight in the supposed wickedness of his cousin, whose guardian he had been, and whose lands he now occupied.

He grew angry at this plain-speaking, and began to swear, as is the wont of such men. If kindness would not move me, he said, something else should be tried. I thought I was free and independent of him, did I? I should see what power was in his hands, and what mischief he could do me. I was young and imprudent. It chafed me to hear that he, and such a man as he, could do me harm—as if the meanest wretch who ever lived cannot do harm—and I told him what I ought to have kept a secret, that so long as Ralph lived, I should not want a protector; and

that so far from his being a highwayman, I knew certainly that he was a prosperous gentleman, already held in great honour, and respected by all.

He was so staggered by this intelligence that I thought he was going to have some kind of fit. Consider how much it meant to him: he would certainly have to give up the mill, and to render a strict account of all his doings; he would be reduced to the station of a poor small farmer; he would be robbed of his revenge; and he would be convicted as a slanderer and calumnious person, if that mattered aught.

First he blustered and threatened. I dared, did I, to reproach him: very good, I should see what things he could do; I should laugh the other side of my mouth. Did I refuse his offer? Very well then. I should find out what his displeasure meant. And, perhaps, before long, I should be sorry for the insult I had offered him, and the proposal I had refused. He then flung away, becoming at this point speechless, and indeed he looked so angry that I was afraid he would have thrown me into the stream.

I went home, and said nothing to anybody about the business; but I was troubled in my mind, and greatly afraid that the man would do some dreadful mischief if he could.

Well, he came again a third time to me. It

was three days later. If I was disquieted, I could see that he was more so. His red cheeks were become pale, and his eyes were red. He was quiet in his manner, and held out his hand.

'Drusilla,' he said, 'I was wrong the other day. You won't marry me? Very well then. Never mind; someone else will if I want. What matters one woman more than another, if you come to think about it? What hurt me most wasn't your refusal, which I don't care for not one brass farthing, but your saying that I wanted Ralph to go bad. That was cruel to such a cousin and guardian as I was to that boy.'

'Well, Mathew,' I said, 'if I was wrong, I pray you to forgive me.'

'I should like to know, on the contrary, that he was becoming a credit to his family. I say,' he added, 'I should like to know it, if you can assure me of the fact.'

'Then you may depend upon the truth of my statement, Mathew,' I said. 'He is already a credit to your family.'

'How joyful a thing this is!' He folded his hands and raised his eyes hypocritically to heaven. 'It shows that the many corrections I gave him produced their effect. I was a throwing of the bread upon the waters. After many days, as one may say, it hath come back to me.'

He spoke with a sweetness which did not deceive me.

'And this prosperity, Drusilla. Who told you of it?'

'That I must not say.'

'Where, in what place, is the boy?'

'That I shall not tell you.'

'How is he employed, then?'

'I must say nothing, Mathew. Do not ask me. It is very certain that Ralph is alive, and that he is prospering. I shall answer no more questions.'

'I will ask other people, then.'

'It is of no use,' I said hurriedly. 'There is no one knows except me.' This was not true, but at the moment I was thinking of my mother, who certainly did not know.

'No one knows except you?' he repeated. 'That is strange indeed.'

'It is very strange.'

'And how long,' he went on, 'is the mystery to be kept up?'

'As long,' I replied, 'as your cousin pleases.'

Then his sweetness left him, and he fell again into a madness of wrath. He went away, however, when he found that I would tell him nothing.

All this time I had not written my answer to Ralph's sweet letter. The reason was that I

feared my words would prove so poor and weak compared with his noble language; and I was afraid besides that what I might say would offend or disappoint him. What maiden but would have been ashamed? Yet this business with Mathew made me resolve to lose no time, and I began seriously to consider what I should say in reply to the long letter which I carried in my bosom and read daily. In order to be undisturbed, I carried paper and pen to the Fugleman's room at the castle, and wrote my letter in the afternoons, whenever I could snatch an hour from my work. What was I to say in answer to the many tender protestations of Ralph? And how was I to speak of Mathew?

'Tell him,' said the Fugleman, 'that Mathew is a villain. Last Tuesday week there was a run to Coldstream—lace and brandy—Mathew stood in and found the ponies. Yet he is a villain.'

'And what about yourself?' I asked.

'As for me,' he said, 'I always said that once the boy got his foot on the lowest rung, it would not be long before he was on the top of the ladder. Half-way up and more he is, I reckon by now. So that I am not surprised to hear of his good fortune, and only wish I was young enough to be his Fugleman. Tell him that first of all. But Mathew is a villain. Next you may say that I'm well and hearty, and likely to con-

tinue in the way of grace, such being my constitution and my habits. Mathew, his cousin, is a desperate villain. Tell him that. You may tell him next, that if he still regardeth eggs, I have got such a collection for him as can't be matched. As for Mathew, he is a rogue and a villain. Fish, tell him, are plentiful this year, and otters there be in plenty. Yesterday I trapped a badger, and I know of a marten opposite the Hermitage. The birds are wild, but I had good sport with his Worship last winter, and hope to do something by myself when the nights draw out. Say next, that I send him my faithful respects and humble good wishes; and Mathew is a villain. And as for your own pretty self, you sit down and tell him that there isn't a straighter maid, nor one more beautiful, on the banks of Coquet; while, as for eyes and shape and rosy lips——'

'Indeed,' I cried, 'I shall tell him no such nonsense. No, I will not tell him such nonsense.'

'Why, he loves thee, sweetheart. Say it, child, to please him, so lonely he is, and so far away from us. I wish he had thy picture just now, with the pretty blushes on the cheeks and all. A girl ought to be proud for such as him to fall in love with her.'

'Is he truly in love with me?' I said, with tears coming into my eyes, because now that the words were spoken, I knew very well how much

I longed for that very thing. 'Why, he says he wishes me happiness with my husband. As if I could take any husband but Ralph.'

'There—there,' he cried, 'tell him that. Tell him that, and it will make him happy and bring him home.'

'You think such a little thing as that would bring him home?'

'There's one thing,' said the old man, 'which women can never understand, and that's the strength and power of love. There was a man in Lord Falkland's regiment—but I cannot tell thee all the story. There was a young gentleman in the Fourteenth, when we were stationed at Gibraltar, in love with a Spanish lady—but of that another time. What did the soldier care that he got three hundred the next day? And as for the young gentleman, he would have done the same—and always said so—if another dozen of duels was to come after it, and him to be pinked in every one. Cheerfully he would have done the same for such another charmer. Ah! he would, and more; but women never understand.'

With these mysterious words did he encourage me as to the force and vehemence among men, of the passion called love.

If Ralph was only home again, we should have a protector. I thought of this and hesitated

no longer. Yet it was an unmaidenly thing which I did, and to this day I am uncertain as to whether I was justified by all the circumstances. It was, besides, a dangerous thing to do, because I am convinced that nothing more effectually turns aside the fancy of a man for a woman—which is a delicate and tender plant, even at its strongest—than the thought that she is lacking in the modesty and reserve which are the choicest virtues of a maiden. Yet I ran that danger, though I imperilled the most precious thing to me in all the world, the heart of my Ralph. But there is a time to speak, as well as a time to keep silence. What I said was this:—

'Dear Ralph,—I have now received your letter, and I thank you for it with all my heart. My father hath lost all in London, and is now returned to his native place; we are, therefore, poor indeed, and have nothing to live upon except the annuity which he long ago bought for my grandmother, who fails daily; when she dies we shall have nothing. Also, my father is afflicted with a strange belief that he is rich. This makes us unhappy. Mathew hath spread abroad a report that the mill is his, and not yours at all, by reason of a second will, which nobody has seen except himself. I fear that you will have trouble with your cousin. The Fugleman is well

and hearty, and bids me tell you——' Here I set forth as many of the messages as I could remember. 'As regards myself, he bade me say many things, out of his kind heart, for he loves me; but I must not write them down. My dear Ralph, do not say again that you want me to have a husband I shall never marry any husband, nor love any man, except yourself, if you still continue to love me. Indeed, there is no moment of the day—if you will not think me unmaidenly to confess this thing—when you are out of my thoughts, and I pray night and morning for your safety and speedy return. Mathew has asked me to marry him, and is angered because I refused. He has spread abroad reports that you are now a highwayman. Will you come back to us, dear Ralph? I am in great sadness, and I am afraid that Mathew means some mischief. Yet I would not mar your fortune by calling you away from the work you have in hand. Mathew threatens me with revenge, and Barbara, his sister, bids me read passages in the Holy Scriptures which threaten woe to sinners. I am afraid what they may do, though I cannot think that they can do us any evil. It makes me unhappy to think that any can believe here that you have become a highwayman. Yet I keep your letter secret, and no one knows where you are. The Fugleman says that a villain must have rope enough to hang

himself. Ah, Ralph, if you could come back to us. But the quiet country would be tedious to you after your splendours and the pleasure of an active life. But whether you come home or whether you stay, you must always believe that I am your loving 'DRUSILLA.

'P.S.—I forgot to beg that you may not take it ill that I have written these words. For, indeed, you may be married, or at least in love, with one more worthy than myself. And if that is so, I wish both her and you many years of happiness and love, and shall only ask her to let me love you still as my brother. How can Mathew presume to court a girl who has known Ralph?'

## CHAPTER VIII.

### IS IT TRUE?

Now was Mathew pulled asunder with a grievous doubt and anxiety. For not only might his enemy, as he considered him, appear at any moment to demand a strict account, but he knew very well that if he pushed on his suit or attempted any devilry with us, I might send for Ralph and ask his protection. Yet could my story be true? How could I know, and I alone, of his welfare and the place of his dwelling? Was it possible, he thought, that such a secret, if there was any secret, should be entrusted to the keeping of a mere girl? If the boy was really doing well, why did he not return on his twenty-first birthday and claim his inheritance? So that the more he thought about it, the more he tried to persuade himself that the thing was false. And yet he was afraid; I could see that he was continually haunted by the fear of what might happen. He sought me often and begged for information concerning his cousin. Next, he tried my father, but his memory as

regards the lad was quite gone; and my mother, but she took no interest in the subject, and said she knew nothing about the boy for her part.

'Yet,' said Mathew, 'your daughter pretends to know where he is and what he is doing.'

'Then,' replied my mother sharply, 'Lord help the man! go and ask my daughter.'

'But she will not tell me.'

'Then how can I? Hark ye, Master Mathew, you come here too often. My daughter hath given you her answer. She bears no love to you; she will have none of you. Go, then, and leave us alone. We are poor enough, God knows, but not so poor as to thrust husbands on our girl against her will. Leave us to ourselves, good man, and find another wife.'

My dear and sacred letter arrived in May. It was in July that I sent off my answer. I might look for a reply in sixteen, eighteen, or twenty months—some time in the winter of the next year, seventeen hundred and seventy-three. It seems a long time to an anxious heart when one has to wait three weeks for an answer to a letter sent to London. What, then, must be the patience of those who have to wait nearly two years? Had I reflected further on the perils of my lover's life, the daily risks of battle, wild creatures, treacherous foes, and deadly fevers, I must have been a miserable wretch indeed during these months of

waiting. Yet I was sustained by hope, which belongs to the time of youth, and looked for nothing but such a reply from Ralph as would, I thought, remove every care from my mind.

What a fond and foolish girl was I to think that a mere love-letter—which was all I looked for—would be able to give us our daily bread!

After this, Mathew remained quiet again for three or four months. That is to say, he came no more to the house. And so we went on in our thrifty way—I engaged with my needle for such ladies as would employ me, my mother watching my father, and my grandmother sitting in her armchair beside the fire, for the most part silent. Indeed, we were all silent except my poor deluded father, who now added a new craze, for he announced one morning very proudly that he had received a despatch from the King himself, by which he learned that his Majesty had been graciously pleased to confer upon him the honour of knighthood, a distinction which in the present day seems reserved for eminent citizens of London rather than for soldiers, as of old. He was now, therefore, Sir Solomon, and his wife was my lady. He also terrified us greatly by saying that the new dignity would oblige him to assume greater state and a more sumptuous manner of living. Our banquets were sumptuous, truly, and worthy of a knight and his lady. However, in

the matter of diet and lodging he was easily satisfied, having been accustomed to plain fare and so entirely carried away by his strange craze as to be persuaded in his own mind that a herring was a turbot; mutton-broth, turtle-soup; and a piece of roast mutton a haunch of venison. But now it was impossible to disguise from our neighbours what, indeed, they had long known, that my father was incurably mad. He expected when he took the air of an afternoon to be saluted with the respect due to Sir Solomon, and hats off from everybody, and was pleased with obeisances which were meant in pity, if not in ridicule. And in his presence my mother must be addressed as my lady and spoken of as her ladyship, which made her hang her head at first and look foolish until she became accustomed to the vanity of the thing and found that it pleased him. For it is a strange thing that if you humour a crazy person in his craze, although you strengthen and confirm him in his belief, you make him happy and satisfied with himself, whereas, if you argue or contest it, or if you pass it over in contempt, you are apt to make him uncomfortable and uneasy without convincing him at all of his error.

So great, and reasonably great, was my suspicion of Mathew, that I was certain he would do something to revenge himself upon me, or to get me in his power. Yet I knew not—I could not

guess—what he would do, or in what way he could injure me, as if the machinations of wicked men can ever be suspected and guarded against; as if the head of him who is desperately wicked may not conceive, yea, and execute, things which an innocent girl would believe incredible. The first alarm was caused by a visit from Barbara, who came to see my mother and myself, together or separately. She said she was a messenger from her brother, who, whatever I might say or think, was the most forgiving and the most long-suffering of men; that he was perfectly prepared, if I would make submission, ask pardon for the injurious things I had said, and reveal what I knew of Ralph, viz.: where he was living, what he was doing, and what were his intentions; to pass over all, and to take me once more into favour.

'Good Lord!' said my mother. "Does the man think he is the Great Bashaw? Favour, indeed!'

'Beggars,' said Barbara, 'must not be choosers.'

At these words my mother flamed up, and asked Mistress Barbara many questions relating to her birth, parentage, wealth, religious professions, personal beauty, and so forth, leaving her no time to answer any. This is, with respect to the memory of a kind parent, a manner of speech common among women—even well-bred City Madams when they are angry. Finally, she said that there had been quite enough said about

Mathew's proposals, and that he was to understand again, and once for all, that they were distasteful; upon which Barbara coughed, and said that she had delivered her message, that she had no desire, for her own part, for the alliance, which would certainly be as distasteful to herself as it was to Mrs. Hetherington, and more so, for her brother had a right to look for fortune, which would be of much more use to him than a baby-face; that she was surprised, being a messenger of peace, and sent by a man of substantial estate, as all the world knew, to be thus treated by folk who were expected shortly to come upon the parish, and the daughter to be glad of honest service and a crust. But enough said.

'Hoity-toity!' cried my mother. 'This is brave talking, indeed, from plain millers and simple farmers. Is the world going upside down?'

Barbara went away, but returned again a little before Christmas. Mathew, she repeated, was of so Christian a disposition that he was still waiting for submission and to know where the boy was to be found. She also held up her skinny finger in warning, and when I laughed and refused either to make submission or tell where Ralph was living, she bade me tremble and read the first chapter of the book of the Prophet Joel, applying verses four to twelve to my own case, especially the last clause, which on investigation proved to

be a prophecy that joy should wither away from the sons of men. I laughed again, but I confess that I was disquieted. What consequences? I was soon to discover that the woman used no idle threat, though I believe that she did not herself know anything of the abominable plot which Mathew was contriving for our destruction.

This, I say, was just before Christmas. We passed the season of festivity in comfort, thanks to a gift from Mr. Carnaby of a noble sirloin and some bottles of good wine for my father; but on Twelfth Night my grandmother, who had become very feeble of late, suddenly showed signs of impending change. This was a truly dreadful thing for us, not only for the loss of a good and affectionate parent, which those who have faith ought not to lament, but because at her death we should lose even the small income which we had, and there would be nothing but the house. It was with despairing looks that my mother and I sat by her bedside all that night. In the morning she died, having been speechless for some hours; but, as happens often with the dying, she rallied just before the end, and recovered for a moment the power of speech.

'Child,' she whispered to me with her last breath, 'thou hast been a good child. The Lord will reward thee. Be of good hope, and never

doubt that the boy will return to be thy protector and thy guide.'

After her funeral I asked my mother if she had any money at all. She told me that on leaving London some of their old friends made up between them a purse of a hundred guineas in memory of old times, but after payment of their small debts and the cost of the journey from London, she had the sum of fifty-five guineas put by for unforeseen wants—that we must live on this money as long as it lasted, after which she supposed we must starve.

Fifty-five guineas! Why, it would last us a year and a quarter at least with prudence. Fifty-five guineas! It was a little fortune to us. It would keep us until I got a letter from Ralph. Whereupon I told my mother to be of good cheer and to wait patiently and hope for the best. She sighed, being never a woman of sanguine disposition, and ignorant of those secret springs of happiness within me which made me think lightly of present poverty.

And now you shall hear a plot of diabolical wickedness, which for the time was successful. We all know that for a season sinners are sometimes permitted to compass their own designs, but for their surer undoing in the end.

Two days after the burial of the Dame, at a time when we might be supposed to be over-

whelmed by the calamity of being left destitute, Mathew came to the cottage. He looked ill at ease, and his eyes met mine shiftily, but he spoke out with boldness, while he produced a leather pocket-book and turned over certain papers within it.

'I have come, madam,' he said, addressing my mother, but looking at me, 'to inform you or your husband—it matters not which—that I can no longer wait for the interest or the principal of my money, and that you must be prepared to pay, or take the consequences.'

'What interest? What money?' asked my mother.

'Why,' he affected great surprise, 'is it possible that you are going to deny the debt?'

'What means the man?' my mother said impatiently.

'Nay,' said Mathew, smiling, but looking like a hangdog villain the while, 'this passes patience. I mean, madam, my loan to your husband.'

'What loan?' she repeated; 'and when?'

'Why,' said Mathew, 'if you pretend not to know, I am not obliged to tell you; but since —— Well, I will tell you. I mean this, madam: the sum of two hundred pounds advanced by me to your husband, for which, and for security, he hath assigned me a mortgage on this house.'

My mother was quite wise enough to know what was meant by a mortgage. She asked, but with pale face, where was his mortgage.

Mathew unrolled a paper and laid it on the table. My mother read it through hurriedly. Then she sank back in her chair and covered her face with her hands, saying:

'It is true, my child. Here is thy father's signature. This is the last blow.'

Mathew rolled up the paper again and put it in his pocket.

'Can you, madam', he asked, 'pay me my money?'

'Go ask of the poor demented creature to whom you lent it,' she replied.

'Then,' said Mathew, 'if the money be not forthcoming, I must sell the house. Yet there is a way——'

'What way?' I asked.

'You know the way. You have only to tell me where the boy is, and to marry me.'

I shook my head.

'And you, sir,' cried my mother, 'you who lend money to poor madmen for the ruin of their house, you—a villain if ever there was one—you think that I would give my daughter to such as you?'

'Very well, madam, very well,' said Mathew, unmoved. 'Very likely the cottage will sell for as much as the mortgage. Perhaps, if not, your

husband may carry his extravagances to a gaol, as provided by a righteous law.'

Here he lied, because, I believe, my father could be called upon for nothing more than the house which was his security.

My mother pointed to the door, and Mathew went away, leaving us bewildered indeed. Two hundred pounds! Now, indeed, we were ruined. But what had he done with the money?

'Mother,' I cried, 'it is a black and base conspiracy. My father has never, since he came from London, possessed a single sixpence. Think of it. If he had a penny we should have known it. Try to remember if ever you saw the least sign of his having money.'

No, there was none. He wrote no letters and received none; he bought nothing. His clothes, which were now old and worn, were the same as those he wore when he returned home. On the other hand, because he was of a generous heart, he was for ever giving away what he called money in large sums by means of drafts upon London bankers, which he would sign and press upon the recipient with kind words. For instance, on my birthday he always gave me an order for a hundred pounds on a piece of paper, signed by his own hand, 'Sol. Hetherington,' bidding me, because I was a good girl, go buy myself some finery and fallals. At Christmas, the New Year, Easter, Roodsmass, fair-time, and other times of

rejoicing, he would fill his pockets with these valuable gifts, and sally forth—first to the Vicar, with an offering for the poor, saying that it was little merit to give out of abundance, that the Lord loveth a cheerful giver, that the poor we have always with us, that a rich man must remember the fate of Dives, and that, for his part, he would that the Church had all charities in her own hand, so that schismatics, profligates, and persons without religion should starve, with other pithy and seasonable remarks. Having received the Vicar's thanks, and a glass of usquebaugh to keep out the raw air of the morning, he would proceed up the village street, the boys and girls touching their caps and making curtsies to him, while the barber and blacksmith would offer the compliments of the season, with a hope that her ladyship was well. Then he would pass the cottage of Sailor Nan, and would call her out and press into her hand a folded paper, saying it was for Christmas cheer; that she must rejoice, with a dish of good roast beef and plum-porridge, and a great coal fire, and bidding her God speed, would go on his charitable way, while some laughed and some looked grave, and tears would fall from the eyes of the women to think that one so good and generous should also be so poor.

Alas! my father was one of those who could never become rich.

Even while we spoke of this, we heard outside the voice of my father, as if to confirm our words:

'It ill becomes men of substance, Mr. Carnaby, to allow poorer parishioners to bear the burden of such things. I will myself repair the roof of the church at my own charges. Nay, sir, permit me to take no refusal in this matter. If it stand me in a thousand pounds I will do it Why, it is a lending unto the Lord; it is a good work.'

It happened that in some way I had more influence over my father than anyone. That is to say, he would unfold his mind—such as it was, poor man!—to me with greater freedom than to my mother, who could never make any show of interest or belief in his magnificent designs and charitable schemes. I therefore tried to learn from him, if I could, the truth of this business. After listening to a long story of his intentions as regards the church and the endowment of the living of Warkworth, I turned the conversation upon Mathew Humble, and asked my father if he had of late seen and spoken with him. He said that Mathew now avoided rather than sought his company, for which he knew no reason, except that when you have obliged a man, it frequently happens that he keeps out of your way—a thing, he said, of common experience in the City, where

young men, incautious men, and unlucky men often obtain assistance in the prolongation of bills and in loans.

'Since I have been of such great service,' he said, 'to Mathew Humble, he seems to think that he must not come so often as he did. A worthy man, however, and, perhaps, he is moved by the shame of taking assistance.'

'Very likely, sir,' I said, wondering what thing, short of the pillory, with the Fugleman and his pike beside it, would move Mathew to shame. 'It is strange that men should thus court the appearance of ingratitude. Did you ever, sir, borrow money, sums of money, of Mathew Humble?'

'Lend, you mean, Drusilla,' he replied, turning red with sudden anger.

'No, sir, I said borrow. Pray pardon me, sir, I had no intention to offend.'

'But you have offended, child.' He puffed his cheeks, and became scarlet with sudden passion. 'You have offended, I say. Not offended? Do you know what you have said? Have words meaning for you? Should I, Solomon Hetherington, Knight, known and venerated for my wealth, from Tower Hill to Temple Bar, and from London Bridge to Westminster, stoop to borrow—to borrow, I say, paltry sums—for he could lend none but paltry sums—of a petty

farmer? Not mean to offend! Zounds! the girl is mad.'

'Pray, sir, forgive me. I am so ignorant that I knew not——'

'To be sure, my dear, to be sure.' He became as quickly appeased as he had been easily offended. 'She does not know the difference between lending and borrowing. How should she?'

'And have you lent Mathew much, sir?'

'As for lending, I have, it is true, placed in his hands, from time to time, sums of money for which I have no security and have demanded no interest. But let that pass. I am so rich that I can afford to lose. Let it pass. And whether he pays them back or not, I do not greatly care.'

'You gave this money to him,' I said, 'by drafts upon your bankers, I suppose?'

'Why, certainly. You do not suppose that we London merchants, however rich we are, carry our money about with us. That would indeed be a return to barbarous times.'

'Then there was the paper that you signed in the presence of an attesting attorney and of Barbara. What was that, father?'

He laughed and made as if he were annoyed, though he appeared pleased.

'Tut, tut,' he said. 'A trifle—a mere trifle; let an old man have his little whims sometimes, Drusilla.'

'But what was it, sir?' I persisted.

'Mathew would have me call it a mortgage,' my father went on. 'A mortgage, indeed! Because he wished his sister not to know. It was—ho, ho!—a deed of gift, child. That is all. It was when I assigned certain lands to him. A deed of gift. We called it a mortgage, but I could not prevent showing Barbara by laughing—ha, ha!—that it was something very different. In addition to the money, I have bestowed upon him a field or so for the improvement of his farm. The gain to him is great; the loss is small to me. A mortgage, we agreed to call it. Ha! ha! Duly signed and witnessed. Your father, Drusilla, is not one to do things irregularly. Duly signed and witnessed.'

This conversation made it quite clear to me that Mathew had contrived an abominable plot for our ruin. For the supposed deed of gift which my father wished to sign, he substituted a real deed of mortgage, in which my father was to acknowledge that he had received two hundred pounds, for which he assigned his house for security, and without, as afterwards appeared, any clause as to time allowed after notice should be given of foreclosing. How far the lawyer was concerned in this conspiracy I know not. Perhaps he was innocent. Indeed, I am now inclined to believe that he was innocent of any complicity.

How far Barbara—perhaps she, too, was ignorant of this wickedness.

All that night I lay awake turning the thing over in my mind. I planned a thousand mad schemes: I would break into Mathew's room and steal the papers. I would go round the town and proclaim his wickedness; I would inveigle him into surrendering the papers by a false promise of marriage; I would seek the protection of Mr. Carnaby. All these things I considered, but none of them approved themselves on consideration, because a forger and a cheat will always be ready, if he escapes punishment for the first offence, to repeat his wickedness. Lastly, I resolved upon seeking Mathew at the mill, where I could talk to him at greater freedom.

I went there in the afternoon about two of the clock. When I lifted the latch I saw Barbara sitting on the settle near the window working. Before her, as usual, lay an open Bible. Strange! that one who was so hard and severe could draw no comfortable things from a book which should be full of comfort.

She shook her long lean forefinger at me.

'I have known,' she said, 'for a long time the ruin that hangs over your house. I saw your father sign the mortgage. He laughed and called it a deed of gift, I remember. Ah! good money after bad. But my brother, who was foolish

enough to lend the money, was not so foolish as to let it go without security. A deed of gift! He is cunning, your father, and would deceive me if he could, I doubt not.' She turned over the leaves and found something that seemed to suit the occasion and my demerits. '"He hath made thy vine bare." My brother is full of compassion. "He hath made it clean bare." Thy punishment hath begun.'

'I wish to see your brother alone.'

'Do you come in peace or in enmity? If in peace, you must first make submission, and confess your deceits as regards the boy, who is surely dead. Nothing else will satisfy him. You can begin with me. Where is the boy?'

'What I have to say is with your brother, not with you.'

'Go, then; but remember, when you are married, look not to be mistress here. I shall continue to be the mistress as I have always been. If you come in enmity, then you have me to battle with and not my brother alone. Two hundred pounds is not a sum to be given away for naught. Men are soft where a woman is concerned; Mathew may be a fool for your sake; you may look to wheedle him out of his papers. Ah, but you shall not. He may be a fool, but I am behind. I am not soft; your eyes will not make a fool of me, Mistress Drusilla.'

She then bade me go within, where I should find her brother.

It was a cloudy afternoon, and, so early in the season, already growing dusk; Mathew was seated before the fire, and on the table a stone jar containing Hollands which he had already begun to drink.

'Pretty Drusilla!' he cried, astonished. 'Have you brought the money?'

'No,' I said. 'I come to learn if you are in earnest or in jest.'

'In jest?' Then he swore a loud oath. 'See you, my lass; if that money is not paid next week, your house will be sold. Make your account of that. But if you comply with my conditions, the papers shall be torn up.'

'Then I am come to tell you, Mathew, that although I shall not comply with your conditions, the cottage will not be sold.'

'Why not?'

'Because, first of all, that mortgage is false. I know now what you did. You caused my father to sign one paper believing it to be another. That is a fraud, and a hanging matter, Master Mathew.'

He laughed, but uneasily, and he turned pale. Also, which is hardly worth the noting, he swore a great oath.

'It's a lie!' he cried. 'Prove it!'

'I can prove it, when the time comes. Mean-

time, reflect on what I have said. It is a wicked and detestable plot. Reflect upon this and tremble.'

He laughed again, but uneasily.

'There is another reason,' I said, 'why you will not sell the cottage. It is this. You are afraid that Ralph may come home and demand an account. Well, I can tell you this: that he will not come home just yet. But, if you do this thing, as sure as I am alive, Mathew, I will write to him and tell him all. I shall tell him how you have persecuted me to marry you, not because you want me for your wife, and though you have had your answer a dozen times over, but because you want to plague and spite your cousin. I will tell him, next, how you have spread false reports about another will, and how you have whispered that he is turned highwayman. And lastly, I will tell him how you have practised upon the kind heart of a poor demented man, and made him sign his name in testimony of your own foul plot and falsehood. I will not spare you. I will tell him all. I will beg him to return post haste, and to bring with him officers of justice. Then, indeed, you may look for no mercy, nor for anything short of the assizes and Newcastle Gaol.'

I spoke so resolutely, though, perhaps, through ignorance, I spoke foolishly, that I moved him and he trembled.

Yet he blustered. He said that all women are liars, as is very well known; that the boy was long since dead and buried; else why did he not return to claim the property? That, as for my story, he did not value it one farthing; while, as regards my accusation, he would laugh. In fact, he did laugh, but not mirthfully.

'Come, Drusilla,' he said; 'your father is welcome to the money, for aught I care. I do not desire to sell the cottage. Sit down and be friendly. Tell me all about the boy; and look, my lass'—his eyes were cunning indeed—'look you. Write to the boy; tell him, if you will, about the money. Tell him that I am willing not to press it if he will give reasonable assurance or security of his own in exchange. Let him, for instance, give me a mortgage on the mill, and let him, since he is so prosperous, pay the interest himself.'

This was a trap into which I nearly fell. But I saw in time that he designed to find out in this way what he had to fear.

'I have told you,' I said, 'what I shall do.'

'Ah! your story, I doubt, is but made up by woman's wit. Drusilla, you are a cunning baggage. Come, now, give over; stay here and be my wife; thou shalt be mistress in everything. As for Barbara, I am tired of her sour looks. She scolds all day. She may pack; she makes the

meals uncomfortable ; she may vanish ; she stints the beer. We will keep house without her. She finds fault from morning to night. She is a——'

'You called me, Mathew?' Barbara suddenly opened the door and stood before us. Her eyes followed me as I went away with malignity difficult to describe, and Mathew, sinking back into his chair, feebly reached out his hand for the jar of Hollands.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE WISDOM OF THE STRONG MAN.

When I went home I told my mother that for the present, at least, we need not fear anything from Mathew. Of this I was quite certain. My assurance that I would appeal to his cousin, the doubt where 'the boy' might be—there was no reason, for instance, why he should not be at Newcastle, or at Rothbury, or at Hexham, or at Carlisle—to say nothing of my charge of fraud, went home to his guilty conscience. These things were sure, I thought, to deter a man not naturally courageous, although his conscience might be hardened, from tempting the vengeance of his injured cousin.

So far was I right, that for the whole of the spring and summer we had no further molestation from him, but continued in our quiet course, spending as little money as we could, yet looking forward to the time, now growing very near, when there would be no more left to spend. As for myself, I may truly declare that my faith was

strong—I mean not the faith of a Christian, such as I ought to have held—but faith in my lover, so far away. He would send me an answer. The answer, whatever it might be, would surely set all right.

Mathew not only ceased to persecute us, but he ceased to desire the conversation and company of my father. He came no more even to church, as if conscious of his wickedness, and ashamed to face honest people. He was rarely seen even in the town, and he left me quite alone; so that I began to think that repentance had perhaps seized upon his soul. Alas! Repentance knocks in vain at the heart of such as Mathew.

Though, however, we saw him not, I heard, through my faithful Fugleman, certain intelligence about him. Thus, he drank harder; he neglected his business; he quarrelled daily with his sister, who reproached him for his drunken ways, and the neglect of his worldly affairs; also, she continually urged him to recover the two hundred pounds owed to him, as she thought, by my father. She hungered and thirsted after this money, which, it seemed, she did not know that her brother possessed. Why had he concealed from her, she asked him with anger, that he had so much as two hundred pounds, when he would not give her even money to buy things wanted for the house? Let him get the money back.

Was he mad to let interest and all go? She let him have no peace; she longed to have this money; perhaps she longed for our ruin as well. Then she constantly threw in her brother's teeth the fact that if the boy was not dead and should return, if, in fact, my story was true, he would find the books and accounts in such confusion as might lead to their ruin. She wanted to know what truth there was in the reports, once so industriously spread, about a second will. In fact, she led the wretched man a dog's life, having a tongue sharper than a sword and more dreadful than a fiery serpent. But, as concerning the things she said of Ralph, I could have desired nothing better, because it kept alive in Mathew's breast the wholesome fear of his cousin's return. So long as that lasted, we were safe. We should have continued in safety, because that fear did not die away, but rather increased day by day, save for the instigation, as I cannot but believe, of the Evil One, and the concoction of a design even more wicked than that of the mortgage. I suppose the plot was conceived in the spring or summer, but it was not until the late autumn that it was attempted. The way of it was as follows (I do no harm, I trust, by speaking openly of a traffic which, as everybody knows, is conducted almost openly all over the northern counties of England and the southern counties of Scotland).

I have mentioned one Daniel, or Dan, Gedge, always called the Strong Man, because he was like Hercules, the fabled Greek, for bodily strength, who lodged with Sailor Nan. He professed to make a living out of his strong arms and legs. He went to fairs, and was seen on market-days in all the towns of Northumberland, Durham, and Carlisle performing great feats for wagers, or for money laid down. He would tie heavy weights to his nose and bear them so suspended round the market; he would lift and carry a pony or a cow; he would crush—but this was nothing to him—pewter pots with his hands, break iron bars and great pokers over his left arm—as many as they might bring to him; he would twist gold and silver pieces of money, if gentlemen gave them to him, with his fingers; carry a dozen men upon his shoulders and in his arms; run round a table on his thumbs; pull a cart against a yoke of oxen, and perform many other surprising feats, the memory of which still survives though the poor man is dead, having been surprised by a snow-storm when in liquor, so that he sat down and fell asleep in the drift, his mighty thews availing him naught, never to wake again. By these performances he made great gain, which he spent, for the most part, on the spot where he was paid, and in drink, having a thirsty spirit, and, besides, being ready when he

had the means to oblige other thirsty souls who had not. He was a man standing over six feet, with legs and arms of surprising stoutness, a square red face, and a kindly eye. Despite his strength he was peaceful, and the softest-hearted of mankind. Now, though he pretended to live by the exhibition of his strength, which I believe was the reason why the Vicar called him Milo, it was very well known everywhere that he had another and a more important source of profit. This was in the running of 'stuff' across the Border, a business which demands, as everybody knows, much caution, with knowledge of the country and powers of endurance. The 'stuff' consists generally of brandy, lace, silk, and Geneva. Salt is also smuggled across, but a better profit is made out of the former articles, which are less in bulk and more easily concealed. There are many reasons why Warkworth should be a convenient spot for the illicit trade. First, it lies two miles up the river, and has many safe hiding-places, so that a cargo once landed at the mouth of the Coquet may be safely and speedily carried up the river, and bestowed where it is judged safe; for all along the steep banks there are spots clearly designed by Nature for the convenient storage of valuable packages. Not to speak of the thick hanging woods beside the banks, where enough Geneva and Hollands may

be stored to supply London for a year, there is the Hermitage, whose double chamber I have myself seen packed full of silk in bales waiting for an opportunity, while in the Castle itself there are vaults, dungeons, passages, and secret chambers, known only to the Fugleman. Here, little suspected by my Lord of Northumberland, enough brandy might be stored to supply the county (which is a thirsty one) for a dozen years. The Border is not, to be sure, so near as it is higher up the coast, but on the other hand, the look-out and watch kept by the gaugers cannot be by any means so vigilant and close as where the county narrows to the north; while more than half the run takes place over the wild moors and pathless slopes of the Cheviots, a place in which the Excise people find it difficult indeed to discover or to stop a run made by men who know the country. They have a service of ponies for the work, little, hardy, sure-footed creatures, who carry the ankers, kegs, and bales slung across their backs, and can be trusted to make the whole thirty-five miles from Warkworth to the Border in a single night; that is, in seven or eight hours, the drivers walking or riding beside them.

Most of the farmers and craftsmen of Warkworth take a share in these risks and profits; one or two of them—of whom Mathew was one—

often accompany and lead the expedition. Everybody knows beforehand when a run is arranged; many in the town know the very night when it will take place, the road chosen, and the value of the stuff. There is so much sympathy with this work, on both sides of the Border, and so many partners in the venture, that information is never given to the Excise, and hiding-places are found everywhere, with the help and connivance of the most innocent-looking plough-boy and the most demure country lass.

Now one morning—it was in November, when the days have already become short, and the nights are long and dark—Dan Gedge got up from his sleeping-bench or cupboard in the wall, about eight or a little after, calling lustily for small beer, of which he drank a quart or so as a stay to his stomach before breakfast. Then he dressed and came forth to the door with the mug in his hand.

Sailor Nan was already seated on her stone, pipe in mouth, and three-cornered hat on her head. She had taken her breakfast, and now sat, regardless of the raw cold air—for all the winds that blow were the same to her—looking up and down the street, in which nothing as yet was moving, though the blacksmith's apprentice across the road had lit the fire, and the cheerful breath of the bellows made one feel warm.

'Fugleman and me,' said Dan, yawning, 'Fugleman and me, we was rowing up and down from Amble most all night.'

'What is the run?' asked Nan, who needed no other explanation; 'and who's in it?'

'Mathew Humble is in it for one,' said Dan. 'Going with it himself, he is, this journey. Ho! ho! Folks will talk of this run when they come to hear of it. The Fugleman thinks he knows. But he don't; no, he don't know. He's not to be trusted. I'm the only one who knows. Aye, a rare run it will be, too—out of the common this run will be. Folks will lift up their heads when they hear of this night's work.'

'What is it, Dan? Lace belike?'

He shook his stupid head and laughed.

How could Mathew have been such a fool as to trust him?

'Belike there's lace in it, and silk in it, and brandy in it. There's always them things. But there's more, Nan—there's more.'

'What more, Dan?'

'Fugleman, he'll laugh when he hears the news. He's helping in the job, and he don't know nothing about it; only Mathew and me knows what that job is. Mathew and me—and one other.'

'Who is the other, Dan? And what is the job?'

He shook his head and buried it for safety in the pewter-pot.

'Mathew Humble,' he said, 'is a masterful man.'

'What is the job?' asked Nan, feeling curiosity slowly awaken.

'It is a job,' replied Dan, 'which can't be told unto women.'

'Why, ye lubber,' she sprang to her feet and shook her fist in the Strong Man's face, so that he started back; 'lubber and land-lubber, you dare to call me a woman—Captain of the Foretop. Now, let me hear what this job is that I am not to be told. Out with it, or——' I omit the garnish of her discourse, which consisted of sea-oaths.

'Mathew Humble did say——' the Strong Man began. But strong men are always like babies in the hands of a woman.

''Vast there, Dan,' said Nan; 'd'ye think I value your job nor want to know what it is—a rope's end? But that you should refuse to tell it to me, your shipmet—that's what galls. And after yester'-forenoon's salmagundi!'

This accusation of ingratitude cut poor Dan to the quick. In the matter of sea-pie, lobscouse, and salmagundi (which is a mess of salt beef, onions, potatoes, pepper, oil and vinegar, the whole fried to make a toothsome compound) Sailor Nan was more than a mother to him.

'Twenty years afloat,' continued Nan, in deep disgust; 'from boy to Captain of the Foretop, and from Cape Horn to the Narrow Seas and Copenhagen, and to be told by a land-swab, who never so much as smelt blue water, that I'm a woman!'

'O' course,' said Dan feebly, 'I didn't really mean it.'

'Didn't mean it! Why—there! What is it, then? Is it piracy, or murder?'

He shook his head.

'Look ye, Nan. It won't signify, not a button, telling you. I said to myself at the beginning, "Nan won't spoil sport;" and it's only a girl.'

Only a girl! Nan pricked up her ears. 'As if I cared about girls,' she said carelessly.

'Only a girl. It's Miss Drusy—that's all. You see she's been longing to run away with Mathew, and marry him, for months. Longing she has, having took a fancy for Mathew, which is a strange thing, come to think of it, and she so young. But women are——. Ay, ay, Nan, I know. You see I always thought she was saving up for Ralph Embleton. But Mathew, he says that's nonsense. Well—she all this time longing to marry him, and her mother won't hear it—no chance till now. So it's fixed for to-night. What a run! Lace, and brandy, and Geneva, and a girl.'

'Oh—well; I don't care. Go on, Dan, if you like.'

He then proceeded to explain that Mathew had arranged for a pony to be saddled in readiness; that the signal agreed upon between the girl and Mathew was a message from the castle carried by a certain boy named Cuddy, pretending to come from the Fugleman, who was to be kept out of the way, employed at the Hermitage, where the stuff was bestowed; the boy was to say that the Fugleman was ill. On receiving this message the girl would make an excuse to run up to the castle, where she would mount the pony, and so ride off with Mathew and be married over the Border. To keep up appearances, he went on—this soft-headed giant—it had been arranged that the young woman was to scream and struggle at the first, and that Dan should lift her into the saddle, and, if necessary, hold her on. Once across the Border they would be married without so much as a jump over the broomstick.

Nan slowly rose.

'I'll get you some more beer, Dan,' she said.

She went indoors, and poured about three-fourths of a pint of gin into a tankard which she filled up with strong ale, and brought it out to her lodger with tender care.

'Drink that, Dan,' she said; 'it's good old stingo—none of your small beer. Drink it up;

then you can put on your coat and go about your work.'

He drank it off at a gulp, with every outward sign of satisfaction. Then he suddenly reeled and caught at the doorpost.

'Go and put on your coat, Dan,' she said, looking at him with a little anxiety.

He disappeared. Nan heard one—two—heavy falls, and nodded her head. Then she followed into the room and found the Strong Man lying upon the floor, on his back with his mouth open and his eyes shut. She dragged a blanket over him, and went out again to sit on her stone with as much patience as a spider in October. She sat there all the morning as quiet as if she was on watch. About half-past two in the afternoon there came slowly down the street no other than Mathew Humble himself.

'Where is Daniel?' he asked.

Nan pointed to the door.

'He's within, fast asleep. He came home late last night. I dare say he'll sleep on now, if you let him alone, till evening.'

'Have you—has he—talked with you this morning?' Mathew's eyes were restless, and his cheek twitched, a sign of prolonged anxiety or much drink.

'Nay; what should he say to me, seeing that he came home in the middle of the night as

drunk as a pig? Let him bide, Master Mathew. What do you want him for? Is there a run?'

He nodded.

She held out her hand. 'I'll drink luck to the venture,' she said, taking the shilling which he gave her for luck. 'Thank you; this is sure to bring you luck. You'll say so to-morrow morning. Remember that you crossed old Nan's palm with a shilling. A lucky run! Such a run as you never had before. A run that will surprise the people.'

'Ha! ha!' said Mathew, pleased with the prophecy. 'It shall surprise them.'

'And how do you get on with Miss Drusy, now? So she said nay. She will and she won't —ay, ay—I know their tricks. Yes, a fine girl, and spoiling, as one may say, for a husband. Take care, Master Mathew. Better men than you have lost by shillyshally.'

'Why, what would you have me do, Nan?'

'Do? A man o' mettle shouldn't ask. Capture the prize; pipe all hands and alongside; then off with her; show a clean pair of heels; clap all sails.'

'I believe, Nan,' Mathew said, 'that you are a witch.'

'I believe,' she replied, 'that after your run you'll be sure I am. Go in and wake Dan.'

The fellow, roused rudely, sat up and rubbed his heavy eyes.

'You can't be drunk still, man,' said Mathew, 'seeing it's half-past two in the afternoon.'

'My head,' said Dan, banging it with his great fist, 'is like the church bell before the service—goeth ding-dong. And my tongue, it is as dry as a bone. Last night—last night—— Where the devil was I last night?'

'Get up, fool, and put on your coat and come out. We have work to do.'

The fellow made no reply. He was stupidly wondering why his head was so heavy and his legs like lead.

'Come,' Mathew repeated, 'there is no time to lose. Up, man.'

They left the house and walked up the street.

When they were gone, Nan took the pipe out of her mouth, and considered the position of things with a cheerful smile.

'As for Mathew,' she said with a grin, 'he will get salt eel for his supper. Salt eel—nothing short.'

She doubted for awhile whether to impart the plot to the Fugleman. But she remembered that though he was no older than herself he would take the thing differently, and a fight between him and Dan, not to speak of Mathew as well, could have only one termination. Had

she been twenty years younger, she would not have hesitated to engage the man herself, as she had led many a gallant boarding-party against any odds. But her fighting days were over.

What she at last resolved upon marked her as at once the bravest and the most sensible of women. But her resolution took time for the working out. She sat on her stone seat and smoked her pipe as usual. When any boys passed her door she shook her stick at them, and used her strange sea phrases, just as if nothing was on her mind.

It grows dark in the short November days soon after four, which is the hour when folks who can afford the luxury of candles light them, sweep the hearth, and prepare the dish of cheerful tea. There was no tea for us that year, but small ale of our own brewing or butter-milk. And my mother sat in great sadness for the most part, not knowing what would be the end, yet fearful of the worst, and being of feeble faith. Certainly, there was little to give her cause for hope.

It was at half-past six or seven that I heard footsteps outside, and presently a knock at the door. I saw, to my amazement, no other than old Nan. It was a cold and rainy evening, but she had on nothing more than her usual jacket and hat. A hard and tough old woman.

'Child,' she said earnestly, 'do you think that I would lead thee wrong, or tell thee a lie?'

'Why, no, Nan.'

'Then, mark me, go not forth to-night.'

'Why should I go forth? It is past six o'clock, and already dark.'

'If messengers should come—— Look! who is that?'

She slipped behind the door as a boy came running to the door. I recognised him for a lad, half-gipsy, who was well known to all runners, and often took part in driving the ponies. A bare-headed boy with thick coarse hair and bright black eyes, who was afterwards sentenced to be hanged, but reprieved, I know not for what reason, and I forget now what he had done to bring upon him this sentence.

'The Fugleman says,' he began at once, seemingly in breathless haste, 'that he has fallen down and is like to have broken his back. He wants to see you at once.'

'Oh,' I cried, 'what dreadful thing is this? Tell him I'll come at once. Run, boy, run. I will but put on a hat and——'

The boy turned and ran clattering up the road and across the bridge.

Then Nan came out from behind the door.

'It's true, then. The kidnapping villains! It's true. But I never had a doubt. Go in

doors, hinney. Stay at home. As for the Fugleman, I'll warrant his back to be sound as my own. Wait, wait, I say, till you see Mathew's face to-morrow! A villain, indeed!'

'But, Nan, what do you mean? My dear old Fugleman a villain! What has he to do with Mathew?'

'No, child, not he. There's only one villain in Warkworth, though many fools. The villain is Mathew Humble. The biggest fool is Dan Gedge. He is such a fool that he ought to be keel-hauled or flogged through the Fleet, at least. Stay at home. This is a plot. The Fugleman is in the Hermitage at work among the stuff. There's to be a run to-night. And they think—— Avast a bit, brother. Aye, aye, they shall have what they want. There's a hock of salt pork and a pease-pudding for supper. I looked forward to that hock. Never mind it. The villain—he to run this rig upon a girl! But old Nan knows a mast from a manger yet, and values not his anger a rope's end.' Here she became incoherent, and one heard only an occasional phrase, such as —'from the sprit-sail yard to the mizen top-sail halyards'; 'a mealy-mouthed swab'; a 'fresh-water wishy-washy fair-weather sailor'; 'thinks to get athwart my hawse,' and so forth. To all of which I listened in blank wonder. Thus having in this nautical manner collected her thoughts

—strange it is that a sailor can never mature his plans or resolve upon a plan of action without the use of strong words—she begged me to lend her my cardinal, which was provided with a thick and warm hood, of which we women of Northumberland stand in need for winter days and cold spring winds. She said that she should keep her own cloth jacket, because the work she should do that night was cold work, but she borrowed a woollen wrapper which she tied over her head and round her neck, leaving her three-cornered sailor's hat in my keeping. Lastly, she borrowed and put on a pair of warm leather gloves, remarking that all would be found out if once they saw or felt her hand. This, to be sure, was a great deal larger than is commonly found among women. When all these arrangements were complete, she put on the cardinal and pulled the hood over her head. 'Now,' she asked, 'who am I?'

Of course, having my clothes upon her, and being about the same height, with her face hidden beneath the hood, she seemed to be no other than myself. Then with a last reference to swabs, lubbers, and land pirates, she once more bade me keep within doors all night if I valued my life and my honour, and trudged away, telling me nothing but that a piratical craft should that night be laid on beam-ends, that her own decks were

cleared, her guns double-shotted, the surgeon in the cock-pit, and the chaplain with him, and, in short, that she was ready for action.

I saw no more of her that night, which I spent in great anxiety, wondering what this thing might mean. But in the morning, fearing some mischief, I walked up the street to the castle. The Fugleman was in his room; he had sent me, he said, no message at all; nor had he fallen; nor had he broken his back. The boy Cuddy, it appeared, had been helping him, and running about backwards and forwards all day. When the ponies were loaded he had returned to the Hermitage to set all snug and tidy. When he came back to the castle they were gone. But no breaking of backs and no sending of the boy. This was strange indeed.

'Then, Fugleman,' I said, 'Mathew Humble sent a lying message, meaning mischief.'

What he designed I understood in two or three days. But for the time I could only think that he wished to open again the question of his suit. Yet, why had Nan borrowed my cardinal and my gloves?

On the way back I looked into Nan's cottage. The door was open, but there was no one in the house.

I went home, little thinking what a narrow

escape was mine. Had I known—but had I known, I should have been divided between gratitude to Heaven, and admiration of brave old Nan, and detestation of the greatest villain in England.

## CHAPTER X.

### SAILOR NAN'S RIDE.

THE night was cold and raw, with a north-east wind, which brought occasional showers of sleet. There was no moon. The street, as the old woman walked up to the castle, was quite deserted, all the women and girls being seated at home about bright coal-fires, knitting, sewing, and spinning, while all the men were at the ale-house, telling stories or listening to them, an occupation of which the male sex is never wearied, especially when beer or rumbo, with tobacco, accompanies the stories.

Nan climbed up the castle hill, and passing through the ruined gate, began to pick her way slowly among the stones and heaps of rubbish lying about in the castle-yard. The light of the fire in the Fugleman's chamber was her guide, and she knew very well that just beside the door of that room would be lurking Strong Dan, with intent to seize her by the waist and carry her off. Perhaps he designed to carry her in his arms all

the way to the Border. This thought pleased her very much. Dan was quite able to do it, and the distance is only thirty-five miles or so. It pleased her to think of such a ride in the Strong Man's arms, and how tired he would be at the end.

Accordingly, when she drew near the door she went very slowly, and was not in the least surprised when, as she stood in the fire-light, the man stepped from some hiding-place at hand, caught her by the waist, and tossed her lightly over his shoulder, making no more account of her weight than if she had been a mere bag of meal.

'Now, mistress,' he said, 'struggle and kick as much as you like. It don't hurt me.'

She cheerfully acceded to this request, and began so vigorous a drumming upon his ribs that had they not been tougher than the hoops of the stoutest cask, they must have been broken every one. As it was, he was surprised, and perhaps bruised a little, but not hurt. He had not thought that a young girl like myself had such power in her heels.

'Go on,' he said; 'you're a strong 'un, and I like you the better for it. Kick away, but don't try screaming, because if you do I shall have to tie your pretty head in a bag. Master Mathew's orders, not my wish. Besides, what's the use of pretending, when there's nobody here but you and me, bless your pretty eyes! I know all

about it, and here's a honour for you to be carried off, nothing less, by your own man. Why, there isn't another woman in Warkworth that he'd take so much trouble for. Think upon that! Now then, miss, another kick, or a dozen, if you like. Ah, you can kick, you can. You're a wife worth having. A happy man he'll be. Lord, it would take the breath out o' most that last kick would. Why, I'll swear there's not a woman in all Northumberland with such a kick as yours. Keep it up.'

Thus talking, while she drummed with her heels, he slowly carried her through the dark gateway, picking his feet among the stones.

Outside the castle, beyond the great gate, another man was waiting for them, wrapped in a great cloak. It was Mathew Humble. He had been drinking, and his speech was thick.

'Now,' he said, seizing the prisoner by the arm, 'you are in my power. Escape is impossible. If you cry out—but I am your master now, and for the rest of your life I mean to be. You have got to be an obedient wife. Do you hear? I've had enough of your contempts and your sneers. You'll write to the boy, will you, mistress? Ha! Fine opportunities you will have on the way to Scotland to-night. Ho! The boy will be pleased when he hears of this night's job, won't he?'

'Come, mistress,' said Dan, setting her down

gently, 'here's the place and here's the ponies, and if you like, just for the look of the thing and out of kindness, as a body may say, to rax me a cuff or a clout, why—don't think I mind it. Oh, Lord!'

It was a kind and thoughtful invitation, and it was followed by so vigorous, direct, and well-planted a blow that he reeled.

'Lord!' he cried again, 'I believe she's knocked half my teeth down my throat. Who the devil would ha' thought a slip of a girl—— Why, even Nan herself——'

He asked for no more clouts, but kept at a respectful distance.

There were half-a-dozen ponies, all loaded in readiness for the road. Mathew, Dan, and the boy they called Cuddy were to conduct the expedition, the two latter on foot, the first on pony-back. There was also a pony with a saddle, designed, I suppose, for me.

'Now, Drusilla,' said Mathew, 'get up; there is a long journey before us and no time to spare. Remember—silence, whether we meet friend or stranger. Silence, I say, or——' He shook a pistol in her face.

She drew the hood more closely down, and pretended to shrink in alarm. Then, without any more resistance, she climbed into the saddle, and took the reins from Mathew's hands.

'That's a good beginning,' he said. 'Maybe you have come to your senses and know what is best for yourself. And hark ye, my lass, if you behave pretty, we'll send Barbara to the devil. If you don't, you shall have a mistress at the mill as well as a master. Think upon that, now.'

Then the procession started. First Cuddy; then the ponies, two by two, who followed the boy as the sheep follow their shepherd; lastly, Mathew, upon his pony; Nan upon hers; and on the other side of her Dan Gedge, still wondering at the unexpected strength displayed in those kicks and that clout.

In addition to the advantages already spoken of possessed by Warkworth for the convenience of a run, should be mentioned the happy circumstance that it lies close to the wild lands, the waste moors and hills which occupy so large a part of Northumberland. These moors are crossed by bridle-paths, it is true, but they are mere tracks, not to be distinguished from sheep-runs except by the people who use them, and those are few indeed. If you lose the track, even in broad daylight, you run the risk of deep quagmires, besides that of wandering about with nothing to guide the inexperienced eye, and perhaps perishing miserably among the wild and awful hills. As for the boy Cuddy, he possessed a gift which is sometimes granted even to blind

men, of always knowing where he was and of keeping in the right path. It is with some an instinct. He was invaluable on these winter runs, because, however dark the night, whether the moors were covered with thick fog or impenetrable blackness, or even if they were three feet deep in snow, he never failed to find his way direct to the point whither they desired to go. In general, however, the wildest road, though the shortest, was avoided, and the ponies were driven through the country which lies north, or north-east of the Cheviots. But on this occasion, so great was Mathew's desire to ensure the safety of a run in which his ponies carried something more precious even than lace or rum, that he resolved upon trying the more difficult way across Chill Moor, south of Cheviot. Even on a summer day the way across this moor is difficult to find. On a winter's night it would seem impossible. Yet Cuddy declared that he could find it blindfold. They were to cross the Border by way of Windgate Fell and to carry their stuff to the little village of Yetholm on the Scottish side.

If you draw a straight line on a county map almost due west from Warkworth, you will find that it passes near very few villages indeed all the way to the Scottish Border. The ground begins to rise a mile or so west of the town, and though up to the edge of the moors the country is mostly

cultivated, the only villages passed the whole way for thirty miles, are Edlingham, Whittingham, and Alnham, and it is very easy for safety's sake to avoid these. First, then, they rode slowly and in silence for six or seven miles as straight across the country as hedges and gates would allow. Presently striking the bed of the Hampeth Burn, they followed it up, rough as the way was, as far as the Black Tarn, which lies among the hills east of Edlingham. Here they turned to the right, keeping still upon the high ridge, and crossed Alnwick Moor, whence they presently descended till they found themselves in the little valley down which the river Aln flows at this point. Here the going was as bad as could be, the ponies feeling their feet at every step, and the progress slow. Yet they never stopped for an instant, nor did the boy hesitate. Mathew kept silence, riding with hanging head, full of gloomy thoughts.

It was past midnight, and they had been in the saddle five hours and more, when they reached the place, close to the village of Alnham, where they were to leave the guidance of the winding burn and trust themselves to the knowledge of the boy upon the pathless moors. Here, under the shelter of a linney, Mathew called a halt. Dan produced a lantern and a tinder-box, and presently got a light. Then he found some pro-

visions in one of the packs, and they ate and drank.

'You are so far from your friends now,' said Mathew to his prisoner, 'that you can talk and scream and do just exactly what you please, except run away. Now you guess what I am going to do. Once over the Scottish Border you will be my wife by Scottish law, if I call you wife. So that now, you know, you had better make up your mind and be cheerful.'

She made no reply.

'Well, then, have you got nothing to say?'

She had nothing.

'Sulk, then,' he said roughly. 'Fall a sulking till you are tired. You may think, if you please, what your young devil of a sweetheart will say when he finds the nest empty! Alive and prospering, is he?'

He proceeded to express his earnest hope that the boy would shortly be beyond the reach of hope. This done, he informed Nan that the worst part of her journey had yet to be accomplished, and that she had better take some meat and drink, unless she wished to fall off her saddle with fatigue, in which case Dan would have to carry her. She accepted without speaking, and, under cover of her hood, made an excellent supper, being, in fact, already pretty well exhausted with fatigue and hunger. When she had

finished, Mathew offered her a bottle which contained brandy. He was amazed to find when she returned it to him that she had taken at one draught about half-a-pint of the spirit, so that he looked to see her reel and fall off the pony. That she did not do so he attributed to the effect of the cold night air and the long ride, being unsuspicious how strong and seasoned a head was hidden beneath that hood.

Supper finished, Mathew examined the boy concerning the road. He would tell nothing at all about it, yet he said he knew where to find it, and how to follow it, and, in short, undertook to guide the party without danger by as short a way as could be found across the moor. He was certain that he could do this, but he would not explain how he knew the way nor in what direction it wound among the hills. In fact, how was a boy to describe a road who knew not north from south, or east from west, nor had any but the most simple English at his command in which to speak of valley or hill, ascent or descent?

The moor over which they crossed that dark night in as perfect safety as if a broad highway had been laid down for them, and was lit with oil lanterns like some of the streets of London, is the wildest, I suppose, in all England. I have heard of that great moor which covers half Devonshire, though I have never been in the south country.

I have read about that other great and wild moorland which lies round the Peak in Derbyshire. I have ridden over the broad heath which stretches from Hexham to Teesdale, a place as wild as the people who live upon its borders, yet have I never seen, nor can I conceive, of any place or country so wild, so desolate, and so forsaken, save by hawks, vipers, and other evil things, as the land which lies by Cheviot, Hedgehope, and Windgate Fell.

The boy, as before, led the way, walking without hesitation, though the night was so dark. What he saw to indicate the road no one can tell. Nan, for her own part, could see nothing at all before her for the pitchy darkness of the night and the continual pattering of the rain.

Here is the very head of the Cheviots, the middle of the moors and fells, across which so many parties of plunderers, cattle-lifters, and smugglers have made their way. There is not a valley among these wild hills which has not witnessed many a gallant fight. There is not a hillside which has not run with streams of blood. There is not a mountain among them all which has not its ghosts of slain men. The heath and ling have been trampled under the feet of thousands of soldiers, for in the old days there was no peace upon the border, and every man was a soldier all his life. But, since the invasion of the

Young Pretender, there has been no fighting on the border. Smugglers have taken the place of the cattle-lifters, and peaceful ponies laden with forbidden goods go across the moor in place of horses ridden by men in iron. For those who love to be awed by the wildness of Nature, a place admirable and wonderful, but full of terror at all times to the heart of sensibility. I do not say, however, that the moors were terrible to any of those who crossed them on this cold and dark night, save for the darkness and the rain, and the fear that at any moment they might all go head first into a quag. The boy, to begin with, was quite insensible to any impressions which can be produced by natural objects; rocks, precipices, wild stretches of land, dark woods—all were alike to him. As for Dan, I suppose he never thought of anything at all. Mathew was too full of the gloomy forebodings which always precede the punishment of wickedness, to regard the things around him, and Nan, as insensible as the boy, was wishing only that the journey was over, because she was horribly cold and getting tired.

The boy led them, by that wonderful instinct, up the slope of the hill to a high level, where the wind was keener and the rain colder. He kept as nearly as possible to the same level, leading them round the middle heights upon the slopes of the great Fells and above the dales. The direct

distance is not more than eight miles, but by reason of the winding of the way I suppose they must have doubled that distance. It was one o'clock when they left Alnham behind them, and it was already five before they came down the hill on the north side of Wind-Gate.

'Master,' said the boy at last, pointing at something invisible, 'yonder's Yetholm, and you are in Scotland.'

Mathew started and sat upright in the saddle, throwing back his cloak. He was in Scotland. Why, then, his work was done. He laughed and laid his hand upon his prisoner's arm.

'My wife!' he cried. 'Bear witness, Dan; my wife, I say.'

'Aye, aye, master. Give ye joy, miss. Master, another dram to drink the leddy's health.'

Mathew gave him his bottle. Dan took a deep draught, and then wiping the mouth of the vessel, handed it to the lady.

'Take a drop,' he said, 'it'll warm your blood after that long ride.'

Then followed so prolonged a draught of the brandy, that Dan too, as Mathew had done five hours ago, looked to see the girl, unaccustomed to strong drink, fall from her saddle. But she did not. And honest Dan marvelled, remembering, besides, the vigour of her heels and the unexpected reality of that clout. A wife so

gifted with manly strength of heel and hand, who could also drink so fair, seemed to this simple fellow a thing to be envied indeed.

As regards the run, let me say at once, so as to have done with it, that it was quite successful, and proved a profitable venture to all concerned, though Mathew, for his part, never showed any joy when the work of the night was spoken of. It was a bold thing to venture across the moors on so dark a night; no one in office looked for such a venture in the little village of Yetholm; and the stuff, taken in the farmers' carts to Kelso, was all sold off at once, therefore Mathew might have been proud of his exploit. But he was not. And when the old woman, accompanied by the boy, came home two days later and brought the news of what had happened, the success of the venture lost all its interest in the presence of the wonderful tale they had to tell.

They rode into Yetholm a good while before daybreak, and the people of the inn—little more than a little village ale-house—were still in their beds. It was now raining again, with a cold wind, while they waited for the house to be roused and the fire to be laid. Nan began now, indeed, though she had borne bravely the rough journey of the night, to feel the keen morning air and the fatigue of the long ride. Her limbs were numbed, and when, at last, the door was opened

and the fire lit, Dan had to lift her off the pony and to carry her in. They placed her in a chair before the fire, where she sat huddled up in her cardinal and hood, refusing to take them off.

When all was safely bestowed, Mathew thought him of his bride, and came into the parlour, now bright with a cheerful fire and a candle. He threw off hat and cloak with a sigh of relief.

'Come,' he said, 'let us be friends, Drusilla, since we are married. Yes, child, married. You would have me no other way. Let us have no more sulking.'

She answered nothing.

'Well, it matters not.' Here the landlord and his wife, with Dan and a servant wench, came in together. 'Something to eat,' Mathew ordered. 'Anything that you have. My wife is tired with her ride over the moors.'

'Over the moors?' This was the landlady. 'You haven't, surely, brought a leddy over the moors on sic a night as this?'

'Indeed, but I have,' he replied. 'Come, madam.' He seized her by the arm and dragged her off the chair—oh, the gentle wooer!—so that she stood before him. 'Bear witness, all of you,' he said, taking her gloved hand. 'This is my wife, my lawful wife, by Scottish law.'

Now whether such is the Scottish law I know

not at all, but in Northumberland it was always believed that, across the Border, such a form of words, before witnesses, constituted the whole of marriage required by law, although, by way of adding some grace of ceremony, the pair sometimes jumped over a broomstick, or wrote their names in a book, or gave a blacksmith a guinea.

'My lawful wife,' Mathew repeated.

The bride, who had been standing with bent shoulders and bowed head, straightened herself and stood upright. Then the witnesses observed a very curious and remarkable thing. The face of the bridegroom, which should surely on such an occasion show a lively sense of happiness, expressed first astonishment, then uneasiness, and finally terror.

The cause of these successive emotions was simple. When Mathew had repeated his form of words he would have dropped his bride's hand, but she now held his, first with a gentle pressure, next with a determination, and finally with a vice-like tenacity which amazed and filled him with strange fears.

Presently, still holding his hand, she spoke:

'I acknowledge Mathew Humble as my true and lawful husband!'

The voice was hoarse and rough. Mathew, with his left hand, tore off the hood. Before him stood, her mouth opening gradually to make

room for the hoarse laugh which followed, no other than Sailor Nan herself, in her short petticoats and her cloth jacket, with a woollen wrapper tied about her head.

'My husband!' she repeated; 'my loving husband! Would ye believe it'—she addressed the company generally—'he's so fond o' me that he couldn't wait to have the banns put up, but must needs carry me off? Saw ye ever such a braw lover?'

They were all astounded; and when she laughed, still holding the astonished bridegroom by the hand, some of them trembled, because they knew not whether she was man or woman, her voice was so rough, her hair was so short, her jacket was so sailor-like.

'Ah, hinneys!' she laughed again hoarsely, because the air had touched her throat. 'The bonny, bonny bride and the happy groom! Kiss your wife, my husband dear.'

She threw herself upon his neck, and began to kiss his lips.

'You? You?' He tore away his hand from her grasp, tried to push her from him with violence, but she clung fast to him, and retreated step by step to the corner of the room. 'You?'

'Yes, it's me, dearie—it's me. Did ye ever hear the like? To fall in love with an old woman of seventy, like me, and to run away with her! I

never looked to get another husband. There's a spirit for you! There's a bold spirit! Mathew dear, when shall we go back? Oh, the wedding-feast that we will have! Well, we women love a lad of mettle. Is there a boy in Warkworth, except my man here, who would carry his wife all the way across the moors when he might have had me asked in church?'

Dan, one of those who are naturally slow to understand things unless they fall out exactly as is expected, had by this time succeeded in comprehending the whole. He had, he now perceived, carried off the wrong woman, which fully accounted for the vigour of the kicks, the amazing strength of the clout, and the capacity for strong drink.

'Nan!' he cried. 'It's our Nan!'

'It is, ye lubber,' she replied; 'and no one else.'

He then began to laugh too. He laughed so loud and so long, being a man who seldom sees a joke, and then cannot make enough of it, that the landlord, the landlady, and the servant-girl caught the infection, and they all laughed too. Mathew raged and swore. This made Dan laugh the louder and the longer. Mathew ceased to swear; he threw himself into a chair, with his hands in his pockets, and sat, cheeks red and eyes flashing, until the storm of mirth subsided. Then his

dainty and delicate bride banged her great fist upon the table.

'No sheering off now,' she cried. 'You're my man, and a merry and a happy life you shall lead. Mates and jolly sailors all, this is my third husband. The first, he was hanged; the second, he hanged himself; better luck to the third. What a wife he's got!—what a wife! Now then, rum for this honourable company, and a fiddle for the wedding; and more rum and tobacco, and more rum. Stir about, I say.' She produced a bo's'n's whistle, and blew a long shrill call. 'Stir about, or I'll rope's-end the whole crew. Rum, I say; more rum for this honourable company!'

With these words she sprang into the middle of the room, and began to dance a hornpipe with the most surprising skill and agility.

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE SALE OF THE COTTAGE.

When the old woman came home with the boy, the story which she had to tell surpassed all her yarns of salt-sea experience. She told her tale nightly, in exchange for glasses of strong drink. And even Cuddy, the boy, was in request, and sold his information for mugs of beer. The men laughed at Mathew's discomfiture. To most men, indeed, the punishment of wickedness is always an occasion for mirth rather than for solemn reflection. They laugh at suffering, especially when it is unexpected ; and if their dearest friend experiences a misfortune when he most expects a stroke of luck, they laugh. When a vagabond is flogged at the cart-tail; when a shrew is ducked; when a miserable starving wretch is clapped into stocks or pillory, they laugh. That is the way of men. But I have observed that they do not laugh at their own afflictions. Everybody, therefore, including the Vicar and his Worship, laughed at Mathew's discomfiture. They went so far as to say that

Mr. Carnaby told the story to my Lord of Northumberland, who was entertaining my Lord Bishop of Durham, and that both prelate and peer laughed until the valets had to unloose their cravats. Yet I cannot see why one should laugh because a young man is mated to an old wife, expecting to have carried off a young one. To me, it seems as if we should first condemn the crime of abduction, and next, bow to the rod.

After the first laughter, which was like an explosion, or a great thunder-storm, one of those during which the rain-water rattles and slates fall off the roof: a universal burst of laughter when all the men ran together laughing their loudest, holding each other up, loosing neck ties, pumping on the apoplectic, and encouraging each other to fresh hilarity by pointing to Nan the bride: the question naturally arose if anything should be done to mark their sense of the attempted crime by those in authority. A most grievous and intolerable thing it was, indeed, that a young woman should be violently kidnapped and carried away like a sailor by a press-gang; forced to ride thirty miles and more on a winter's night, across the cold and rainy Fells; married willy nilly in the morning without church or parson; and this when she had not once, but many times, refused so much as to listen to proposals of marriage from the man. All were agreed that this was a thing not to be per-

mitted. Yet, what could be done? To run away with a girl of her own free will and accord, and when she would marry the man but for wickedness of guardians, is a different thing; many a maiden has fled across the Border with her lover, amidst the sympathy of her friends. But in this case it was like the carrying away of the Sabine women, and no words could be found by the moralist too strong to condemn the act.

While everybody talked about it, that is to say, for a whole week, there was so much indignation that if Mathew had appeared it would have gone hard with him among the men, to say nothing of the women, who would think of no punishment too bad for him. The townsfolk talked of ducking in the river, of pillory and stocks, and I confess that the thought of Mathew in the pillory was not disagreeable to me. Yet, considering the way of the world, perhaps, if he had been young, handsome, and of pleasant speech, he might have been forgiven the attempted abduction, on the plea of love inordinate. One man, we know, may steal a horse—but then he must be comely and generous—while another, if he is churlish and harsh, is clapped into gaol for looking over a hedge. While, however, they talked, Mathew kept away, nor did he return for three or four weeks, leaving his private affairs neglected; and no one knew where he was in hiding.

We had, however, a visit from Barbara. She came, she said, not out of any love to me or my mother, who had used words so injurious as regards herself, but to express her abhorrence of the crime which her unhappy brother had attempted, and her thankfulness that this madness of his was defeated. She said that she knew nothing whatever of him; where he was or what he was doing; but she hoped that when he returned he would be in a better frame of mind, and feel the remorse which ought to follow such an action. As for the pretended marriage with the old woman, she said that was a thing not to be considered seriously. My mother received her excuses coldly, and she presently went away, after another attempt to discover whether I knew anything fresh about 'the boy.' She desired to know, she said, not out of curiosity, because she was not a curious person, as everybody knew, but because she feared that I might, by representing the late affair in its worst light, bring about a hostile feeling and even a conflict between her brother and the boy, which could not fail of being disastrous to the latter. My mother reassured her on this point, because, she said, Mathew was already well acquainted with Ralph's cane, and, having shown so much bravery in the late affair, which took two men to carry off one woman, would now most certainly have the courage to turn a submissive back to the

chastiser when he should appear. Barbara thereupon went away. Though I loved her not, I could not but feel pity for a woman who had done and suffered so much on behalf of this thankless brother. She was grown much older to look at during the last year or two ; her face was pinched, and wrinkles had multiplied round her eyes with her constant cares. This is an age when gentlemen of exalted rank think it no sin to be put to bed helpless after a debauch of wine or punch ; I hope that more sober customs may shortly prevail ; else, one knows not what will become of us all. Yet, though drunkenness is in fashion, I think nothing can be more miserable for a woman than to sit, as Barbara sat daily, knowing that the only man in the world she cares for is slowly getting drunk by himself in another room, which is what Mathew did. As to the idle talk about the other will and the rightful heir, I know not what she believed in her heart, or how far she joined in the wicked designs of her brother, which were about to be frustrated.

Then Mr. Carnaby, accompanied by his lady and by the Vicar, came in person to express his horror of the crime, and his satisfaction that it was providentially prevented.

'We have discussed,' said his Worship, 'the action which we should take in the matter. At present all we have to go upon is the evidence of

Nan, who is, she says, Mathew's wife, so that if such be veritably the case she cannot give evidence in the matter at all, and that of the boy Cuddy, an ignorant, half-wild lad, who knows not the nature of an oath. Abduction is a great crime; but then Mathew, whatever were his intentions, my child, did actually only run away with an old woman, and she makes no complaint, but rather rejoices, while he is rendered ridiculous. To kidnap a young girl is a hanging matter; but then, my dear, you were not kidnapped. In short, we feel that to bring Mathew to justice would be difficult and perhaps impossible.'

To be sure, one would not wish to hang any man for the worst of crimes, and we had no desire to bring Mathew before any court of law or justice, being quite contented that the offender should feel certain of sharp and speedy justice if he made another such attempt.

'Can we not see him, at least,' asked my mother, 'placed in pillory?'

'I would place him in pillory,' his Worship went on, 'if the old woman who now calls herself his wife—Heaven knows with what right—would lodge a complaint. But she will not. He deserves pillory at the least. And as for rotten eggs, I would myself bring even a basket of new-laid eggs, so that he should want for nothing. And I would condescend to throw them. But she will

not complain. She even laughs and boasts that she has gotten a young husband. And then, which is a difficult point in this doubtful case'—his Worship blushed and looked confused, while the Vicar hemmed and Mistress Carnaby coughed—'he was running a venture across the Border, and no one knows—I say that no one can tell—who may be compromised in this affair as to what he took across or what he brought back, for though Mathew hath great faults, there is no one more skilled—more skilled, I say.'

'No one,' said the Vicar, which completed the sentence for his Worship.

'Wherefore, my dear girl,' continued his Worship, 'I propose waiting until the man returns, when I will reprimand him with such severity as will serve to deter him—and any others of a like mind with himself—from a renewal of his wickedness.'

Mathew did come back, three weeks later; but, although his Worship sent the Fugleman, carrying his pike, to the mill with a command that Mathew should instantly repair to him for admonition, and although the Vicar also repaired to Mr. Carnaby's house in his best gown in order to receive the offender, and to give greater authority to the discipline, Mathew came not. He positively and discourteously refused to obey.

There, it would seem, was a direct breaking

of the law, or, at least, contempt for authority, upon which imprisonment, I dare say, might have followed. But whether from leniency, or on account of that difficulty connected with the late venture, his Worship refrained from severity, and ordered instead that Mathew, for violence and contumacy, should do penance in the church. Here, indeed, was righteous retribution! He would stand, I thought, in the very place where he had caused Ralph to stand nine years before; he would be made to rise up before all the people, and, in a loud voice, to ask their pardon, and to recite the Lord's prayer. I hope I am not a vindictive woman, yet I confess that I rejoiced on learning from the Fugleman that this punishment had been meted out to the evil-doer. We both rejoiced, and we congratulated each other, because we thought that Ralph would also rejoice. Little did we know of that great and lofty mind, when we foolishly imagined that he would ever rejoice over the fall of his enemy.

There was great excitement in the town when it became publicly known by means of the barber, who had it direct from his Worship, that this godly discipline was to be enforced on the person of Mathew Humble—a substantial man, a statesman, a miller, a man supposed (but erroneously) to be wealthy, and a man already thirty-four years of age or thereabouts. Why, for a school-

boy, or a lad of sixteen, or a plain rustic to stand up in this white sheet was joy enough, but for such a show of such a man, this, if you please, was rapture indeed for the simple people. I confess that I for one looked forward with pleasure to the spectacle.

Alas! who would believe that man could be found so daring? Mathew refused contumaciously to perform the penance! This was a great blow and heavy disappointment to all of us; and we looked to see the Vicar excommunicate him. But he did not, saying that disobedience to the Church brought of itself excommunication without need of any form of words. Let Mathew look to his own soul. And as there seemed no means of enforcing the punishment if the offender refused to undergo it, there was nothing more to be said.

The behaviour of Nan at this time was worthy of admiration. On Mathew's return, but not until then, she walked to the mill and informed Barbara that, as her brother's wife, she was herself the mistress, but that, being accustomed to her own cottage, she should not for the present molest her in her occupation.

Then she sought her husband.

It was really terrible to mark how the ravages of drink and disappointment together had made havoc with the appearance of this un-

fortunate man. Unfortunate, I call him, though his punishment was but the just reward of his iniquities. The failure of his plot; the consciousness of the ridicule which overwhelmed him; his shame and discomfiture; the thought of the old woman whom he had called his wife; the messages which he had received from his Worship and the Vicar—his disobedience being connected in some way with partnership in the recent venture; a dreadful vague looking forward to the future, and the constant terror lest Ralph should return, filled his mind with agitation, and gave him no peace night or day. He neglected the work of mill and farm; he would take no meals save by himself, and he drank continually.

He looked up from his half-drunken torpor when Nan came in.

'I expected you before,' he said. 'What are you going to do?'

She poured out a dram and tossed it off.

'I came to see my bonny husband,' she said, 'before I am a widow once more. Eh, man, it's an unlucky wife ye have gotten.'

'Wife!' he repeated; 'wife! Yes, I supposed you would pretend——'

'Hark ye, brother,' cried Nan, bringing down her cudgel on the table with an emphasis which reminded Mathew uneasily of the second husband's lot; 'hark ye! Sail on another tack, or

you'll have a broadside that'll rake you fore an aft from stem to stern. Wife I am; husband you are; wherefore all that is yours is mine.' She hitched a rope into the handle of the stone jar containing the brandy and jerked it over her shoulder. 'The mill is mine, so long as it is yours, which won't be long, shipmet. Last night I read your fortune, my lad. By all I can discover, you and me shall part company before long. But whether you will hang yourself, like my second man, or be hanged, like my first; or whether you will be knocked o' the head—which is too good for such as you; or whether you will die by reason of takin' too much rum aboard, which is fatal to many an honest Jack; or whether you will die by hand of doctors, whereby the landlubbers do perish by multitudes—I know not. Short will be our company; so, as long as we sail together, let us share and share alike, and be merry and drink about. Money—now, I want money.'

He refused absolutely to let her have any money. Without any more words, this terrible woman prepared for action. That is to say, she took off her rough sailor's jacket, rolled up her sleeves, and seized the cudgel with a gesture and look so menacing that Mathew hauled down his colours.

'How much do you want?' he asked.

'Short will be the voyage,' she said. 'Give me ten guineas. Yes, I will take ten guineas to begin with. But don't think it's pay-day. I'm not paid off, nor shall be so long as—— Pity 'tis that I can't read those cards plainer. Well, my dearie, I'm going. If I think I should like the mill better than my own cottage, I'll cŏme and stay here. You shall see, off and on, plenty of your wife. Ho! ho! The bonny bride! and the happy groom!'

She left him for that time. But she went often, during the brief space which remained of Mathew's reign at the mill. Each time she came she demanded money, and rum or usquebaugh; each time she threatened to live with her husband; each time she terrified Barbara with the prospect of staying there. And the man sat still in his room, brooding over the past, and thinking, not of repentance, but of more wickedness.

One day, he rode away without telling his sister whither he was going or what he designed. He did not return that night, but two days later he rode into the town, accompanied by a grave and elderly gentleman, and after leaving the horses at the inn, he walked to our cottage. I saw them at the garden-gate, and my heart felt like lead, because I saw very clearly what was going to happen.

In fine, I felt certain that the money would be demanded and our house sold. Mathew, goaded by his sister, who clamoured without ceasing for the money supposed to have been lent to us, and unable any longer to endure his suspense and anxiety regarding their cousin, resolved to bring matters to an issue. Fortunate indeed was it for us he had delayed so long.

They came in, therefore, and the grave old gentleman opened the business. He said that he was an attorney from Morpeth; that the mortgage, of which mention had already been made to Mistress Hetherington, had been drawn up by him at the request of Mr. Mathew Humble; that he had witnessed the signature of my father, and that the business, in short, was regularly conducted in accordance with the custom and the requirements of the law.

I asked him if he had seen the money paid to my father. He replied that he had not, but that it was unnecessary. I informed him thereupon that the money never had been paid at all, but that my father, a demented person, as was very well known, yet not so dangerous or so mad that he must be locked up, was persuaded by Mathew that he was signing an imaginary deed of gift conveying lands which existed only in his own mind, because he had no land.

The lawyer made no reply to this at all.

'Now, mistress,' said Mathew roughly, 'is the time to show the proofs you talked about.'

'My proofs, sir,' I addressed the lawyer, 'are, first, that my father believes himself prodigiously rich, and would scorn to borrow money of such as Mathew Humble; next, that he perfectly well remembers signing this document, which he thought a deed of gift; thirdly, that we know positively that he has had no money at all in his possession; fourthly, that he denies with indignation having borrowed money; fifthly, that Mathew, like everybody else, knew of his delusions, and would certainly never have lent the money; sixthly, that two hundred pounds is a vast sum, and could not have been received and spent without our knowledge. Lastly, that Mathew was known to be a base and wicked wretch who even tried to kidnap and carry off a girl whom he wished to marry.'

'Every one of these proofs,' said my mother, 'is by itself enough for any reasonable person.'

The lawyer replied very earnestly that he had nothing to do with proving the debt; that he came to carry out the instructions of his client, and to give us a week's notice—which was an act of mercy, because no clause of notice had been inserted in the mortgage; that the house would be sold unless the money lent was paid; that it was not his duty nor his business to advise us,

but his own client; that the law of England provides a remedy for everything by the help of attorneys, and that, by the blessing of Heaven, attorneys abound, and may be obtained in any town. Finally, he exceeded his duty by his client in counselling us to put our affairs in the hands of some skilled and properly qualified adviser.

This said, he bowed low and went away, followed by Mathew.

But Mathew returned half an hour later and found me alone.

'You told me,' he said, 'six months ago and more, that should I attempt any harm to you and yours, you would write to the boy. I waited. If your story was true, you would have written to him at once, out of fear. But your story was not true. Ah, women are all liars. I ought to have known that. Barbara says so, and she ought to know.'

'Go on, Mathew,' I said.

'I waited. If your story had been true, the boy would have hastened home. Well, I thought I would give you another chance. I would carry you off. That would make him wince, if he was living. Yet he has not come.'

Did one ever hear the like? To bring his own terrors to an end, or to an issue, he would have made me his unwilling and wretched wife.

'Now I've found you out. Why didn't I think of it before? I asked the post-boy. Never a letter, he truly swears, has been delivered to you—never a one. So it is all a lie from the beginning. Very good then. Marry me, or sold up you shall be, and into the cold streets shall you go.'

I bade him begone, and he went, terrified, perhaps, at the fury with which I spoke. Of this I forbear to say more.

When we sought the advice of Mr. Carnaby, we found that he entertained an opinion about law and justice which seemed to differ from that of the Morpeth lawyer.

'Your proofs,' he said, 'though to me they are clear and sufficient to show that Mathew is a surprising rogue, would go for nothing before a court. And I doubt much whether any attorney would be found to undertake, without guarantee of costs, so great a business as a civil action. Justice, my child, in this country, as well as all other countries, may hardly be obtained by any but the rich, and only by them at the cost of vexatious delays, cheats, impositions, evasions, and the outlay of great sums upon a rascally attorney. Beware of the craft. Let the man do his worst, you still have friends, my dear.'

So spoke this kind and benevolent man. I am sure that his deeds would have proved as good as his words had they been called for.

We told no one in the town, otherwise I am sure there would have been a great storm of indignation against Mathew, and perhaps we did wrong to keep the thing a secret. But my mother was a Londoner, and did not like to have her affairs made, more than could be helped, the subject of scandal and village gossip.

It was now already the middle of December; we should therefore be turned out into the street in winter. As for our slender stock of money that was reduced to a few guineas. Yet was I not greatly cast down, because, whatever else might happen, the time was come when I might expect an answer. In eighteen months, or even less, a ship might sail to India and return to port.

Ralph's letter would set all right. I know not, now, what I expected; I lived in a kind of Fool's Paradise. Ralph was my hope, my anchor. I looked not for money but for protection; he would be a shield. When the Fugleman came to the cottage we would fall to congratulating ourselves upon the flight of time which brought my letter the nearer. He even made notches on a long pole for the days which might yet remain. Yet, oh, what a slender reed was this on which I leaned! For my letter to him might have miscarried. Who is to ensure the safety of a letter for so many thousand miles? Or his reply might be lost on board the ship A letter is a small

thing and easily lost. Or he might be up the country with some native prince; or he might be fighting; or he might be too much occupied to write. A slender reed of hope indeed. Yet I had faith. Call it not a Fool's Paradise; 'twas the Paradise of Love.

Then came the day, the last day, when the money must be paid or we lose our house. That day I can never forget. It was the twenty-third of December. The mummers, I know, were getting ready for the next evening. In the night we were awakened by the waits singing before our house:

> 'God rest you merry, gentlemen,
> Let nothing you dismay,'

and I, who ought to have taken the words for an exhortation to lift my heart to Heaven, lifted it only as high as—my lover. To be sure, he was always a good deal nearer Heaven than his unworthy sweetheart.

In the night there was snow, and when the sun rose the garden was beautiful, and the leafless trees had every little twig painted white; a clear bright day, such as seldom comes to this county of rain and wind in the month of December. If one has to be thrust into the street, one would wish for a day of sunshine. Is it not a monstrous thing that this injustice should be possible? Will there ever come a time when justice and equity

will be administered, like fresh air and spring water, for nothing?

So certain was Mathew of his prey that he sent the crier round at nine in the morning to announce the sale for noon. And directly after eleven he came himself with the attorney; and a man to conduct the auction or sale of the house. We put together, in order to carry with us, our wearing apparel. Mathew was for preventing us from taking anything—even, I believe, the clothes we stood in—out of the house. Even the Family Bible must stay, and the very account-books; but he was rebuked by his lawyer, who informed him that the mortgage included only the tenement or building, but not its contents. We should keep our beds, then. But where to bestow them? Whither to go? My heart began to sink. I could have sat down and cried, had that been of any avail, and if my mother had not set a better example and kept so brave a face.

'The daughter of a substantial London merchant, my dear,' she said, 'must not show signs of distress before such cattle'—she meant the attorney and his honest client. 'Get your things together, and we will see where we can find a shelter, My poor old man shall not feel the pinch of cold and hunger, though we work our fingers to the bone.' Her lip trembled as she spoke.

Meantime my father was giving a hearty welcome to the astonished attorney, whom he considered as a visitor.

'In this poor house, sir,' he said with a lofty air, 'though we have the conveniences which wealth can bestow, we have not the splendour. I trust, sir, that you may give me the pleasure of a visit at my town house, where, I believe, her ladyship will show you rooms worthy of any nobleman's house, not to speak of a plain City Knight, like your humble servant.'

The attorney regarded him with wonder, but answered not. I believe he understood by this one speech how impossible it was that this poor man could have borrowed his client's money.

At stroke of noon the sale was to commence. But as yet there were no buyers. No one was there to bid except Mathew himself, who was impatient to begin.

It wanted five minutes of noon when Mr. Carnaby appeared, bearing his gold-headed stick, and preceded by the Fugleman with his pike, to show that the visit was official. He was followed by a dozen or so of the townsmen, now aware that something out of the common was about to happen.

'Go on with the sale,' cried Mathew impatiently; 'it is twelve o'clock.'

'Stop!' said his Worship. 'Sir,' he addressed

the lawyer, 'you will first satisfy me by what right you enter a private house, and next by what authority you are selling it.'

The attorney replied with submission and outward show of respect that he was within his powers, in proof of which he exhibited papers the nature of which I know not, concluding with a hope that his honour was satisfied.

'Why, sir,' said Mr. Carnaby, 'so far as you are concerned, I may be. I am also satisfied that this business is the conspiracy of a villain against the peace and happiness of an innocent girl.'

'With respect, sir,' said the lawyer, 'the words conspiracy and villain are libellous.'

'I name no names,' but he looked at Mathew, who shifted his feet and endeavoured to seem unconscious. 'I name no names,' he repeated, shaking his forefinger in Mathew's face, 'yet villain is the man who would ruin a helpless family because a virtuous woman refuses to marry him. Villain, I say!'

He banged the floor with his great stick, so that everybody in the room trembled.

'I do not think, sir,' said Mathew, 'that your office entitles you to offer impediment to a just and lawful sale.'

'Prate not to me, Master Kidnapper.'

'If,' continued Mathew, 'Mr. Hetherington

disputes my claim, here is my lawyer, who will receive his notice of action. For myself, I want my own and nothing more. Give me justice.'

'I would to Heaven, sir, I could,' said his Worship. 'Go on with your iniquitous sale.'

It appeared at first as if no one would bid at all for the cottage, though by this time the room was full. Then Mathew offered fifty pounds. Mr. Carnaby bid fifty-five pounds. Mathew advanced five pounds. Mr. Carnaby bid sixty-five pounds.

Mr. Carnaby was not rich; yet he had formed the benevolent design of buying the house, so that we might not be turned out, even if the rent would be uncertain. Mathew wanted not only the amount of the (pretended) mortgage, but also the pleasure of turning us out. Ah! where was Ralph now? Where was 'the boy' to whom I was going to write for protection if he dared to move?

'One hundred and ninety!' said Mathew.

'One hundred and ninety-five!' said his Worship.

'Two hundred!' said Matthew.

Mr. Carnaby hesitated. He doubted whether the cottage of six rooms and the two acres of ground in which it stood were worth more. The hammer went up. He thought of us and our helpless situation.

'Two hundred and five!' he said.

'Two hundred and ten!' said Mathew.

Again Mr. Carnaby hesitated; again he saw the hammer in the air; again he advanced.

'Two hundred and ninety-five!' said his Worship, mopping his face.

'Three hundred!' said Mathew.

'Any advance upon three hundred?' asked the auctioneer.

Mr. Carnaby shook his head.

'Villains all,' he said, 'I can afford no more. I cannot afford so much. Poor Drusilla! Thou must go after all.'

'Going! going!' cried the man, looking round.

'FIVE HUNDRED!'

Mathew sprang to his feet with a cry as of sudden pain, for he knew the voice. More than that, in the doorway he saw the man.

He reeled and would have fallen but that someone held him; his cheeks were white, his eyes were staring. The blow he had so long dreaded had fallen at last. His enemy was upon him.

The figure in the doorway was that of a gentleman, tall and stately, still in the bloom and vigour of early manhood, gallantly dressed in scarlet with gold-laced hat, laced ruffles, diamond

buckles, and his sword in a crimson sash. Alas! for Mathew. The girl had told no lie.

The Fugleman, being on duty, contemplated things without emotion, even so surprising a thing as the return of the wanderer. But he saluted his superior officer, and then, grounding his pike, looked straight before him.

This was the answer—this was the reply to my letter. Every woman in love is a prophet. I knew, being in love, that my sweetheart would make all well; I knew not how; he would bring peace and protection with him, for those I loved as well as for myself.

Great and marvellous are the ways of Providence. I knew not, nor could I so much as hope that the answer would be such as it was—nothing short of my lover's return, to go abroad no more.

## CHAPTER XII.

### 'GOD REST YOU MERRY, GENTLEMEN.'

WHAT remains to be told?

Ralph was home again. What more could I have prayed for?

While these things went on we were sitting in the kitchen. In my mother's eyes I seemed to read a reproach which was not there, I believe, but in my own heart. I had prophesied smooth things, and promised help from some mysterious quarter which had not come.

'There are five guineas left,' said my mother. 'When these are gone, what shall we do?'

I tried to comfort her, but, alas! I could find no words. Oh, how helpless are women, since they cannot even earn bread enough to live upon. When the bread-winner can work no longer, hapless is our lot. What were we to do when these five guineas were gone? For, if I could find work to keep my fingers going from morn till night, I could not make enough to keep even myself, without counting my father and my

mother. What should we do when this money was gone? We must live upon charity, or we must go upon the parish. At the moment of greatest need my faith failed me. I thought no more of the letter I was to receive; I ceased to hope; my Paradise disappeared. I was nothing in the world but a helpless woman, a beggar, the daughter of poor, old, broken-down people, whose father was little better than a helpless lunatic.

We heard from the parlour, where they were holding the auction, a murmur of voices, some high and some low. Suddenly there was a change; from a murmur of words there arose a roar of words—a tumult of words. Strange and wonderful! I should have recognised the voice which most I loved. But I took little heed. The misery of the moment was very great.

'So'—now, indeed, I heard the voice of his Worship, which was a full, deep, and sonorous voice—'so may all traitors and villains be confounded! Kidnapper, where are now thy wiles?'

I heard afterwards how Mathew would have slunk away, but they told him (it was not true) that his wife was without brandishing her cudgel. So he stayed, while his attorney, ignorant of what all this meant, congratulated his client upon the sale of the cottage. Five hundred pounds, he said, would not only suffice to pay his own bill of costs, which now, with expenses of travelling

and loss of time, amounted to a considerable sum, but would also repay Mathew's mortgage of two hundred pounds in full, and still leave a small sum for the unfortunate gentleman they had sold up. Mathew made no reply. He looked fearfully into his cousin's face; it was stern and cold. There was no hope to be gleaned from that face, but the certainty of scrutiny and condemnation. What had he done to merit leniency? Conscience —or remorse—told him that he had tried to kidnap his cousin's sweetheart; to drag her down to destitution; while, as regards his own trust and guardianship, none knew better than himself the state in which his accounts would be found.

The words of Mr. Carnaby reached every ear. But yet I heard them not, as I sat looking before me in mere despair. For I knew not what to hope for, what to advise, or what to do.

Then the door was thrown open, and there was a trampling of feet which I regarded not at all, or as only part of this misery. The feet, I supposed, belonged to the man who was coming to turn us out. I buried my face in my hands and burst into violent weeping.

'Is this some fresh misfortune?' It was my mother who sprang to her feet and spoke. 'Are you come, sir, to say that we owe another two hundred pounds? What would you have with

us on such a day? We have nothing for you, sir, nothing at all, whoever you are; we are stripped naked.'

'Madam,' this was his Worship's voice, 'you know not who this gentleman is. Look not for more misfortunes, but for joy and happiness.'

Joy and happiness! What joy? What happiness? I began to prick up my ears, but without much hope and with no faith.

'My lord'—this time it was my father, who saw before him a splendid stranger, and concluded in his madness that it was some great nobleman come to visit him. 'My lord, I thank you for the honour of this visit. My lady will call the men and maids. I fear you are fatigued with travel. You shall take, my lord, a single bowl of turtle soup, as a snack, or stay-stomach, the finest ever made even for the Lord Mayor, with a glass or two of Imperial Tokay, the rarest in any cellar, before your dinner. Not a word, my lord, not a word, till you are refreshed; not a word, I insist.'

At these utterances I raised my head, but before I had time to look around me, a hand was laid upon my shoulder, while a voice whispered in my ear, 'Drusy!'

Oh, we foolish women! For when the thing we most long for is vouchsafed, instead of prayers

and praise upon bended knee, we fall to crying and to laughing, both together.

Why, when I recovered a little, they were all concerning themselves about me, when they ought to have been doing honour to Ralph. The Fugleman had a glass of cold water in his hand; my mother was bathing my palms; Sailor Nan was burning a feather; my sweetheart was holding my head; and my father was assuring his Worship that nothing less than the King's own physician should attend his daughter, unless she presently recovered. He also whispered with much gravity that he had long since designed his Drusilla for his lordship, just arrived, who, though of reduced fortunes, was a nobleman of excellent qualities, and would make her happy.

We heard, later, that Ralph brought with him an attorney from Newcastle, a gentleman very learned in the law, and the terror of all the rogues on the banks of the Tyne. With this gentleman and a clerk, beside his own servants, he rode first to the mill.

He found Barbara engaged in her usual work of knitting, with the Bible before her open at some chapter of prophetic woe. No change in her, except that she looked thinner, and the crow's-feet lay about her eyes. She recognised him, but showed no emotion.

'You are come home again,' she said. 'I

have expected this. Mathew said the girl lied, but he was afraid, and I knew she did not. Girls do not lie about such things. You come at a fine time, when your sweetheart is begging her bread.'

'What?' asked Ralph.

'I said she was begging her bread. She said you were prosperous. If fine clothes mean aught you may be. Lord grant they were honestly come by.'

'I will now, Colonel Embleton,' said the attorney, 'place my clerk in possession and seal everything.'

'Where is Mathew?' asked Ralph.

'He is in the town. You will find him selling their cottage—Drusilla's cottage. By this time your dainty girl will be in the road, bag and baggage.'

'What?'

'Pride is humbled. The girl has begun to repent of her stubbornness. Of course so fine a gentleman as you would scorn a beggar wench.'

With such words did this foolish and spiteful woman inflame the heart of a man whom she should have conciliated with words of welcome.

He left her and rode into the town with such speed as the snow, now two feet deep, would allow.

An hour later, Mathew, pale and trembling, rushed breathless into the mill.

'Has he been here?'

Barbara nodded.

Mathew went hastily to his room. Here he found the attorney with his clerk.

'These are my papers,' he cried, now in desperation. 'Everything is mine. The house is mine, the mill is mine, the farm is mine.'

'Gently, gently,' said the lawyer. 'Let us hear.'

Mathew played his last card.

'A second will was found,' he said; 'it is in the desk.'

'We will wait,' said the lawyer, 'until the return of Colonel Embleton.'

When Ralph came back, accompanied by Mr. Carnaby, he found Mathew waiting for him.

'Now,' said the lawyer, 'let us see this second will.'

He opened the desk and drew forth the paper which Mathew pointed out. When he had unfolded and looked at it for a moment, he looked curiously at Mathew.

'This,' he said, 'is your second will?'

'It is,' Mathew replied. 'Found five years ago, and——'

'Quite enough,' said the lawyer. 'Friend,' he had by this time compared the signature with that of the first will, 'I make no charge, I only inform you as a fact, that this document is valueless, as

bearing neither date nor witnesses, and if it did, it would still be valueless, because the signature is a forgery, plain and palpable. It will hang someone if it is put forward.'

Mathew dropped his hands by his side. This was the fruit of his labours. He had forged the will; he had made it of no use by neglecting the witnesses; he had forged it so clumsily that he was at once detected.

'Any well-wisher of yours, sir,' said the lawyer, 'would recommend you to put that paper in the fire.'

Mathew did so without a word.

'Sir,' said the lawyer, 'you have saved your neck. Have you any more to say about the will?'

He had no more to say. The plots and designs of nine years came to this lame and impotent conclusion.

'Then, Mr. Humble,' the attorney continued, 'I have nothing more to say than this: Colonel Embleton expects an accurate statement of accounts and payment to him of all sums due to him without delay.'

Mathew made no reply; he was defeated. He left the room, and presently, one of them looking through the open door, saw him leave the house with his sister.

Ralph spoke not one single word to him, good

or bad. By this time he had heard of Mathew's attempted abduction and all his iniquities. There was no room in his heart for pity.

In the morning Sailor Nan came to draw her pay. She heard that her husband had deserted her. She lamented the fact, because she had intended to be kept in pork, rum, and tobacco so long as he was alive. But she was easily consoled with a jorum of steaming punch.

Thus vanished from amongst us one who had wrought so much evil, for which I hope that we have long since entirely forgiven him (but he was a desperate villain), and we never knew what became of him.

It was ten years later that Barbara came back alone.

We found her in the porch one summer evening. She was worn and thin, and dressed in dreadful rags.

'Oh,' I cried, moved to pity by her misery, 'come in and eat, and let me find some better clothes for you.'

She refused, but she took a cup of milk.

'I want to see the boy,' she replied in her old manner of speech.

When Ralph came home she said what she had to say.

'Mathew ought to have had the mill. If it had been his, he would not have taken to drink

and evil courses. You were an interloper, and we both hated the sight of you. When you went away, I used to pray that you might never come back. The waiting for you and the fear of you made him wicked. That is all I have to say.'

'Where is Mathew?'

'Dead. Ask me no more about him. He is dead.'

Ralph led her, unresisting, into the house.

'Wife,' he said to me, 'you have heard Barbara's confession. I, too, have had hard thoughts about her. Let us forgive, as we hope for forgiveness.'

She stayed with us that night—an unwilling and ungracious guest—and the next day Ralph placed her in a cottage, and gave her an allowance of money, which she took without thanks. Perhaps her heart grew less bitter as years fell upon her; but I know not, for she died and made no sign.

On that year Christmas Day fell on a Thursday. Now, Ralph, who, though a grave man and the colonel of his regiment, showed more than the customary impatience of lovers, would be content with nothing short of being married on the very next day after his return. It is almost incredible that he should have had the forethought to bring with him a special license, so that we were not

obliged to have the banns read out. Could I refuse him anything? Therefore, on the Wednesday morning, the very next day after he came back, we were married in presence of all the town, I believe, man, woman, and child, while the bells rang out, and our joyful hearts were warm, despite the cold without. I was so poor in worldly goods that I must have gone to the sacred ceremony with nothing better than my plain stuff frock, but for the benevolence of good Mrs. Carnaby, who lent me a most beautiful brocaded silk gown, which, with all kinds of foreign gauds, such as necklaces, bracelets, and jewels for the hair, which my lover —nay, my bridegroom—bestowed upon me, made me so fine that his Worship was so good as to say that never a more beautiful bride had been married, or would hereafter be married, in Warkworth Church.

Thus do fine feathers make fine birds. When the next bride is married in brocaded silk, with a hoop, her hair done by the barber, and her homely person decorated with jewels, people will be found to say the same thing. Yet, since my husband, who is the only person I must consider, was so good as to find his wife beautiful, should I not rejoice and be thankful for this strange power of one's outward figure—women cannot understand it—which bewitches men and robs them of their natural sense until they become used to it.

After the wedding we went home to the mill, where my husband spread a great feast. In the evening came the mummers with Sailor Nan, who drank freely of punch, and wished us joy in language more nautical than polite. His Worship slept at the mill because he was overcome with the abundance and strength of the punch. Even the Fugleman, for the first time in man's memory, had to be carried to bed, preserving his stiffness of back even in the sleep of intoxication. And the next day we had another royal feast, to which all were invited who had known my dear husband in his youth. But to me it was a continual feast to be in the presence of my dear, to have my hand in his and to rejoice in the warmth of his steadfast eyes.

We are all, I hope, Christian folk, wherefore no one will be surprised to hear that on the morning of the day after the marriage, which was Christmas Day, after the singing of the hymn, 'When shepherds watch their flocks by night,' my husband, giving me his hand, led me forth before all the people, and in their presence thanked God solemnly for his safe return, and for other blessings (I knew full well what these meant). Then the Fugleman leading, his pike held at salute, he recited the Lord's Prayer. Thus in seemly and solemn fashion was the long sorrow of nine years turned into a joy which will endure, I doubt not, beyond this earthly pilgrimage.

# THEY WERE MARRIED

# *PART I.—MON DÉSIR.*

## CHAPTER I.

### A NEW-YEAR'S DAWN.

NEW-YEAR'S DAY, in Palmiste Island, is very nearly the longest in the whole year; it is also about the hottest, if one may say as much without giving offence to other days. It is on this account that the sun on this day, having so much work to do, gets up as early as six o'clock in the morning, an hour before his July time, after announcing his intention by sending up preliminary fireworks in red and crimson. When the cocks see these rockets in the east they leave off crowing and go to roost. If you ask naturalists why the cocks crow all night in Palmiste, they generally say that it is because the island lies south of the Equator. Those who are not satisfied with this explanation are further told that it is by the laws of development and the natural growth of ideas that the Gallic mind has been

brought to prefer coolness for times of crowing. The reasons of things offered by science are, we know, beautifully satisfying, and always make us feel as if we could almost create a world for ourselves if we only had a good big lump of clay and a box of stored electricity and a bucket of water and a pint of compressed air. When the cocks have left off, the white man's dogs, and the Malabar dogs and the Pariah dogs immediately take up the tuneful tale, so that silence shall never be a reproach to the island. The journey performed by the chariot of his Majesty the Sun on that day, a most fatiguing one to his horses, involves a tremendous climb at the start and a breathless descent at the finish; and is, in fact, nothing less than a vertical semi-circular arc in the heavens. The nature of the curve may be illustrated for unscientific persons by any young lady who will kindly raise her arms above the head, and join the tips of her fingers. At stroke of noon, on that day every man Jack and mother's son in the place becomes another Peter Schlemihl, inasmuch as he has no shadow. Strangers, at such a time, creep round houses and great buildings and precipices looking for the usual shade. They go to the north side, the south, the east, and the west, and find none. Then they think their wits must be gone for good, and sit them down to cry. The woolly-pated

sons of Africa, for their part, rejoice in perpendicular rays; they have taken the roof off their straw hats the better to enjoy them; they sit in the open, courting their genial warmth; they acknowledge with a grateful sigh that, after all, there is a little heat sometimes to be got in a generally cold and cheerless world. It is not till after seven in the evening that the sun has finished the journey and is ready to plunge red-hot into the cool waves. For five minutes or so after his header there is a tremendous seething and roaring of the maddened water; it is, of course, too far off to hear the noise, but anyone can see the smoke of it, which is red and fiery, cooling down to sapphire and then becoming grey, after which the stars come out, and it is night.

In this English land of mist and fog we never see the phenomenon of sunrise at all; for either it is hidden behind cloud, or it rises too early, or it is too cold for us to get up and look at it. There must be, indeed, many men, quite elderly men, among us who have never seen the sun rise at all. Now, in Palmiste most of the people behold this most wonderful of natural phenomena every day. Perhaps the man on the Signal-mountain has the best view, because from his elevated position he can see the leaping of the sun from the sea, and the long furrows of light upon the startled ocean, and the sudden renewal of the unnumbered smiles,

and the rolling of the mists about the valleys. But, as the man on the Signal-mountain is too often a mere creature of duty, and must always subordinate sentiment to the watching for ships, it is probable that more joy is got out of the sunrise by the people below, who can give their whole attention to the exhibition provided by Nature.

Certainly, there is plenty to be seen down below. There was a pair, for instance, standing in the verandah of the house belonging to the estate of Mon Désir, who seemed, on this New-Year's dawn, to find a great deal of enjoyment in the hour and the scene before them, though there was nothing that they had not seen before, times out of mind. But then they had one great advantage over the man on the Signal-mountain, that he is one and they were two—Hic et Hæc : Ille cum Illâ—which makes a very great difference ; indeed. And they had other advantages. For, when the sun first appeared to them over the brow of the hill between themselves and the sea he shone on this particular morning straight down an avenue of palms ; he painted every leaf of every tree so that it glowed like red gold ; as for the trunks, the tall green trunks, he painted them in a great variety of colour, such as carmine and golden red, and a dark green inclined to go off into purple, and a most lovely, creamy, rich, soft brown, which did the eyes good to see,

all the more because it only lasted a few moments. The two who looked caught their breath and gasped, so beautiful was the scene. To make it the more complete, because a suggestion of life always improves a picture, there suddenly appeared at the end of the avenue an Indian woman: she was dressed rather better than most coolies' wives, and, being a Madrassee and not a common Bombay person, she wore a long skirt or petticoat down to her heels, with a red jacket, and bangles up to her elbows, and, over head, shoulders, and all, a veil of coarse gauze. This is the kind of thing that the rising sun likes: it is good material for a sun to operate upon at his first joyous outset: so he seized upon that woman and turned her into a bride, standing rapt, motionless, waiting for the groom, clothed and veiled, mystic, wonderful, in white lace, and he caused colours inexpressible in words to play about the dress beneath the veil. Only for a moment. Then they raised their heads, this pair of early risers, and saw how, upon the peak of the highest mountain in the island, there lay another bridal veil, but of cloud, and how the sunshine struck it and it flew back as if the bridegroom was come and would gaze upon the face of his bride. And there were smaller things to note, for the lawn at their feet, not quite like an English lawn, because nothing in all the world

is so good as a good English thing at its best, but a well-kept and tolerably smooth lawn, glittered as if it was strewn with a million diamonds and was worth the whole of the Cape, with Potosi and Golconda thrown in; beside the lawn the glorious Flamboyant hung out its flaming blossoms to greet the sun, and the Bougainvilliers proudly showed its purple flowers, and the banana-trees and acacias with their perfumed flowers, and the Elephant creepers, and wonderful things with leaves of crimson and gold and long botanical names, which in England would have had pet and pretty names, welcomed the sun and proclaimed that they had all grown each one twelve inches at least during the night in order to honour the dawn of New Year's Day.

The house was long and of one story, built with a deep verandah all round it, that on one side forming a kind of general sitting-room, open all day long to all airs that blow, affording almost a quadrangular draught; grass curtains, now pulled up, protected it from the afternoon sun and the white glare of the moon; it was laid with grass mats, and there were long cane chairs in it, and small tables with work and books upon them. Evidently a place used for the daily life. Three or four doors opened upon it; that on the left hand belonged to the private room, or study,

or office of Mr. Kemyss, Seigneur of Mon Désir; that on the right led into the boudoir or school-room, or retreat of Virginie when she felt disposed to be alone; the door in the middle led into the salon, a large room, with a piano, and a few, not many, engravings, and more cane chairs, with books and magazines—a place not in the least like an English drawing-room, yet filled with the atmosphere of home and refinement—the haunt and home of ladies. Such a house in Palmiste is constructed entirely, so to speak, with a view to the salon and the salle à manger. They are the two principal rooms—the only rooms. To the right and left of them on the same floor are the bedrooms; at the corners and in unexpected places, built out as the family grows, are other smaller bedrooms belonging to the children or the girls. The verandah at the sides is provided with jalousies, so that it may serve for a dressing-room, bath-room, or nursery. The bedrooms are simply furnished each with a pretty little French bedstead in green and gold, protected by a mosquito-curtain and an armoire. There is nothing else, because nobody in Palmiste is expected to use the bedroom for any other purpose than sleep. The salle à manger, papered with one of those French designs—a man on horseback, a girl with a guitar, anything—which repeats the same scene a thousand times, is meant

for a feeding or banqueting room, and nothing else. Therefore it contains nothing at all but a table, a sideboard, and chairs. At the back is the kitchen, and one can only say of a Palmiste kitchen that, although many a good dinner is turned out from it, the stranger would do well not to pry into its mysteries, nor to ask of the Indian cook how he does it. Behind the kitchen is a long garden, planted with all kinds of vegetables, European or tropical, according to the season of the year: at the end of the kitchen-garden there is a double row of banana-trees, their leaves blown into ragged ribbons and broken ends, each with its pendent cluster of green fruit and purple bud. And behind the bananas there are the *cases*—the cottages for the servants and their wives; and here there is quite a colony of little brown babies sprawling about in the sun, with no more clothes than Adam before the Fall, and bright-eyed boys, miracles of intelligence, and already eager to learn the various and multiform tricks, lies, treacheries, and make-believes, by which a crafty Oriental may make his way from small things unto great.

On the right of the great house stands a smaller one, called the Pavilion. The son of the house sleeps here, and all bachelor guests, of whom at the season of the *bonne année* there are always three times as many as there are beds

to put them in, so that they toss up for the beds, and those who lose make out as they best can upon mattresses stretched upon the floor. Therefore, the New Year is by this arrangement turned into a most beautiful and festive time for the mosquitoes.

The Pavilion has also its own verandah, but much smaller and narrower, and without any curtains or mats. Yet there are plenty of chairs in it; chairs with prolonged arms, in which the occupant may put up his feet; basket-work chairs, with a ledge which may be pulled out for the feet; low chairs in which one's feet need no support; rocking-chairs; and a lovely grass hammock, in which, with a Coringhee cigar, and something with ice in it, and perhaps a book requiring no effort to understand it, and dealing with pleasant subjects, one may while away the hottest afternoon, swinging slowly. There is not much paint left about the old Pavilion, it is true; the floor of the verandah, which is of concrete, is cracked; the jalousies of the bedroom windows are out of repair; but the roof is still weather-proof, and the beds are comfortable, and there are these chairs to sit upon, and the verandah faces the east, so that in the afternoon, when man most inclines to rest and meditation, the sun may be avoided.

To the right of the Pavilion, again, was the

sugar-house, a great place, with the mysteries of which we have nothing to do, except that the whirr of the machinery and the wheels, and the loud, well-satisfied breathing of its untiring steam-engine sounded pleasantly on mornings when the crop had commenced. On this day, however—New-Year's Day—the day of the *bonne année*, no man, not even a Malabar, on a sugar estate can be expected to work. Outside the sugar-house lay piles of the white *bagasse*, the refuse of the canes which have been crushed, with their sweet and rather sickly smell; and here, too, was the great barn-like stable for the mules, with the doors always left wide open, because these sagacious animals know very well which is the best place for them, and are far too wise to go straying from a comfortable shelter where they are well fed and well looked after. Why, as they very well know, mules who have strayed have been known to get lost in the ravines, and to tumble over waterfalls, and be eaten by big eels, or to be captured by Maroons, and made to lead a deuce of a life carrying out their villanies in the forest. Who would be the accomplice of brigands and poachers? Beyond the mule stable a road leads to the Indian Camp, a village where the coolies of the estate live with their wives, their babies, their brass pots, their dogs, their goats and little kids, their cocks and hens and chickens, and

their pigs. It is quite a large and populous village, in which the dreams of the Socialist are realised; for all the houses are exactly alike, and the people are all on the same social depression, and the way of living is the same for all, and there is a beautiful, monotonous level. There are such villages and communities in England; but they are rare. One such I remember in the Forest of Dean, which seems to resemble an Indian camp on a sugar estate; but even there they have a church and two or three chapels, and there are differences of rank and position. The camp is a noisy place, too; for the babies never cease crying, and the children quarrel continually, and the dogs for ever bark, and the women accuse each other for ever in shrill and ear-piercing voices. What do they accuse each other of? Matter of cakes, my masters, and ghee, and gungee, and cocoa-nut oil, and nose-rings and silver bangles. What farther, one knoweth not. Every day, after a whole morning spent in invective, retort, accusation and defence, they sally forth, and bring the case before the Sahib, the Seigneur and Lord of the estate, who hears the evidence, and makes an award, and admonishes them to keep the peace. They accept the award as final, but yet they do not keep the peace.

And on all sides of the house there stretch

the broad fields of the estate, planted with the sugar-cane ; narrow paths cross them, and sometimes there is a rough-and-ready tramway. All day long the coolies work among them, cleaning and weeding, heedless of the hot sun, because they are anointed, and beautifully shine, with cocoa-nut oil, so that every man's back is a mirror for his friends. Beyond the cane-fields, on all sides but one, is the forest ; for there are yet miles of forest left ; and beyond and among the wild woods stand the everlasting hills.

Now, when the first glimmerings of the dawn were welcomed by the silence of the cocks and the barkings of the dogs, there began in the mule stable an uncertain agitation, as of expectancy, and, each, in his stall, the mules began to open eyes, to kick out in dreams, to whinny, to fidget, to shake a tail, to paw the ground, and to look around. At exactly the moment, and no other, when the sun first touched the topmost leaves and the single spiral shoot of every palm-tree in the Avenue, the oldest and most sagacious mule left his stall, and led the way out of the stable into the bagasse yard, followed by all his friends and lively companions. Then there ensued such a turning over on backs, kicking of legs, rolling about on the soft stuff, champing of the sugary canes, and letting out of heels at each other in pure gamesomeness, that you would have said the

mules knew it was New-Year's Day, and had begun at very sunrise to enjoy the holiday. This was not so, however, for mules are a philosophical, albeit a light-hearted race, and know that life is made up of twelve hours' labour and twelve hours' repose. Therefore they do what they can to get through the first half as easily as may be, and go in for unmitigated enjoyment of the second.

After the mules had spread themselves out on the bagasse, and the Indians' dogs were all barking in the camp, and the Indian women all scolding, there was no longer any pretence possible for lying in bed. So that the Chinaman who kept the only shop on the estate rolled off his counter, and opened his door, and let down his shutter, and allowed the escape of the night's accumulated fragrance. A village shop in this our native land presents a rich field for research in the science of smells, particularly on a warm summer morning, when it has just been opened. But what is it compared to a Chinaman's shop in Palmiste? Bacon and cheese form our own staple. One cannot deny that these are good, separately or in combination, for the production of a rich and grateful perfume. But the Chinaman, in a much smaller space, has the fragrant and united product of snook, which was once live cod-fish, half-cured pork, rotten bananas, sardine-

boxes lying open for a week, a keg of arrack, cheese, gungee, his own opium-pipe, cocoa-nut oil, blacking, and cigars, all combining together to produce a stench of extraordinary strength. When the doors and windows were open it fell out, a solid though invisible lump of concrete smell, irregularly shaped, which rolled, slowly at first, but afterwards more rapidly, down the hill. On the way it encountered a brood of tender yellow ducklings, who were going along—poor dears—thinking of nothing at all but worms and warm mud. These pretty innocents, when the rolling mass fell upon them, all tumbled over on their backs, opened their beaks, and quacked their last. Then the ball rolled over the side of the road down a steep slope, upon which it met and poisoned a promising family of young tandreks, and so over the edge of the ravine, getting broken into a thousand fragments, and doing no more harm to anybody.

Not far from the Chinaman's stood a little cottage, built of packing-cases and roofed with their tin lining, in which there lived an old, old negress, well advanced in the nineties. She was a witch by profession: she revealed the future, either by cards, or by inspection of the palm, or by interpretation of dreams, or by the reading of omens; she charmed away sprains, warts, bruises, and internal injuries by the simple application of

her own hand; she cursed people's enemies for them, and made crafty gri-gri, which revengeful persons smarting under a sense of wrong bought and placed under the beds of those who had wrought them that injury, so that these wicked folk presently fell into waste and consumption and slow dying—a joy to behold. She cured all diseases by herbs which she gathered in the forest and under the rocks of the ravine; and it was whispered that if you wanted such a thing as a safe but elegant preparation of poison, which would kill without leaving a trace behind, this good old lady would make it up for you from plants which she would find in every hedge. She, too, awoke with the dogs and the mules, and perceived that here was another day whose joyful course awaited her running. She found her joints rather stiff at first uprising, a thing which surprised her, because she had not been brought up in her childhood to expect it, and she sat for an hour or two in the warmest and sunniest place, with her grizzled old wool exposed to the rays, and so gradually recovered the use of her limbs and got warm, and felt young again, and set to work upon the finishing of a most beautiful gri-gri, with a cat's skull in it and two dogs' paws and a shark's tooth—a gri-gri which was intended to cause internal pains and burnings not to be allayed, and thirst insatiable, and sleepless rolling

about at night, and mental distress, loss of appetite, delirium, convulsions, death and a long black box. And all for five dollars. She is a most useful and admirable creature, and it is sad to think that when she goes—she is not gone yet—she will leave no successor. There used, in the old days, to be plenty of such old women, but emancipation was a cruel blow to them : the new contentment and ease of the negroes discouraged the profession ; there is no longer any demand, to speak of, for gri-gri and vegetable poisons ; the coolies know for themselves where to find stramonium and what it will do in skilful hands : the old slaves are dead, and their sons are not revengeful on account of their fathers' wrongs, and when this old woman goes there will be no one left to carry on her forgotten craft. The reflection should make the old witch sad ; but she does not reflect : she thinks she is still in comparative youth ; she takes no heed of time, and she believes she will live for ever.

The two standing on the verandah were a young man of two-and-twenty or so and a girl of seventeen. They were always up first, and they always met here and had their morning talk at sunrise, while the girl poured out the early tea and sent it round to the bedrooms. The Indian boy, who had made the tea and brought it from the kitchen, stood on the steps rubbing his sleepy

eyes; and lying huddled up, also on the verandah steps, was old Suzette, the black nurse, in a wonderful blue cotton frock and red cotton turban and bare feet. Her grandsons, Napoleon de Turenne and Rohan Auvergne de Turenne, were at the Grand Collége; and her youngest son, their father, who had gone into the brokery line and had been greatly successful, drove about, a splendid personage, in his own carriage. But Suzette remained a nurse; and she was too conscientious a nurse to allow her foster-daughter to get up before her or to remain talking with Monsieur Tom without her presence.

'Chokra,' said the girl to the Indian boy, 'this great cup for the burra Sahib, and this little one for the mem Sahib.'

She spoke, only with these two or three Hindustani words, in the Creole patois, which has been adopted by the Indian and Chinese coolies, and by the Malays, Singhalese, Portuguese, Malagassy, Somaulis, and all the races who are represented, in this island of a thousand tongues, as the common medium. But, like many who have been brought up on a sugar estate, she was a polyglot young lady: her father was English and her mother French. She spoke her father's language perfectly well, with a tendency to make a soft guttural out of the 'r,' which was not unpleasant; and she spoke with perfect fluency her

mother's language; but she would have been as much lost as any Canadian among the half-uttered syllables and nods and winks which stand for French in fashionable Paris; for, in truth, the French of Palmiste may be pure, but it is a little old-fashioned. And she could talk Hindustani of a kind, not the Hindustani of the schools, to be sure, but the tongue of the people, free and unencumbered by grammar and syntax, and understanded of all alike, by the gentle Tamulman, or by him who talks the soft Canarese or the sonorous Pali. She could not talk Chinese, because nobody can, and even the Chinamen out of their native country laugh at their own language; nor any of the Madagascar dialects, because the Malagassy are a polite people, and do not expect it; nor Malay, because the Malay is quick to learn for himself any language that may be going about; nor any of those African tongues which may yet linger in the memories of the blacks, because there is nothing the East African negro more readily forgets than his own tongue, especially when there is such a beautiful language as Creole lying ready for his use, and because nobody ever learns any African language who can help it.

'The men,' said the girl, 'are late this morning. I suppose, too, they sat up last night, and drank too much brandy and soda. Did you sit up, Tom?'

She spoke as if too much brandy and soda was an accident which might happen to anybody; and, indeed, in this thirsty island there do happen a surprising number of these accidents every year. So that it is a pity steps are not taken to prevent them.

The young man replied that, for his own part, he went to bed when his father left them, which was at half-past ten; but that some of them sat late, and there certainly were a great many bottles of soda lying on the verandah; and that they were all fast asleep when he got up, which was before daylight.

He had in his hand a pine-apple, which he had just cut in the garden, and was eating it with a fork. This, if you please, is the true way to eat a pine; and the best time to eat it is in the morning, when it has been freshly cut.

'Will you have a mango, Virginie?' he asked. 'They are ready to be gathered.'

'Send some to the Pavilion,' she replied.

'Ayapana tea,' he said, 'would be more to the purpose. Suzette may go round presently and find out if anybody wants it. If I meet old Pierre, I will ask him to take some *cocos tendres* to the Pavilion. Don't forget the letchis, Virginie.'

Ayapana tea is a grateful drink, made by pouring boiling water upon a certain herb so called: its properties are many: it restores tone

to the afflicted after a severe night; it cools coppers; it drives away headache; it restores the power of coherent speech; it revives the sluggish brain; in fact, it was planted, in the first instance, by the man who made the earliest vineyard, and he placed a root of it between every vine. As for the *coco tendre*, Tom meant the unripe cocoa-nut, which is gathered for the purpose of providing a cool and refreshing morning draught. In cases which do not require the severity of Ayapana tea, the *coco tendre* is efficacious, and it brings with it a coolness which mounts to the brain and runs along the veins and gives elasticity to the limbs. And as for mangoes, they are good for all conditions of men; the temperate, such as Tom, and the eternally thirsty, such as Sandy McAndrew; they are the sweetest gift of nature to the dweller in the tropics; they refresh and revive after a hot and sleepless night; they bring back hope, faith, and courage; they reconcile one to life even when the rainy season has begun, and the floods of heaven are descending, and a soft and steamy heat lies upon the earth, and a vapour rises like that of a universal washing day, and the mildew grows and spreads visibly on the boots, and the covers drop off the books, and the very cigars go out of curl. These two were too young to know much about shattered nerves, and revivers, and pick-me-ups. But

they had heard of such things. Therefore Virginie received the allusion to Ayapana tea with sympathy, and understood what was proposed to be effected by means of the *coco tendre.*

She was seventeen, which is Creole for twenty. And, because she was a Creole, she was of slight and graceful figure; for the same reason she carried herself well and was *gracieuse*—one would like to add a few more of those delightful adjectives which French poets and novelists have at their command. She was dressed in a simple white frock, with a crimson ribbon round her neck.

Nature, who is always—the dear old lady! —thinking how she can spare something more to set off and adorn a pretty girl, had given her a wealth of lovely light curling hair, as soft as silk, which lay all about her face and clung to her pretty cheeks like tendrils of a vine, as if it loved to be exactly in that place and wanted no other; her eyes were blue and soft, with long lashes; her cheek was not ruddy like an English maiden's, but touched with just the tenderest bloom of colour; for, although she had never left the tropical island, she lived among the mountains—Mon Désir was a thousand feet above the sea, so that the air was sharp. Besides, Virginie rambled and climbed up the slopes of the hills and down the steep sides of the precipitous ravine, and was

as sure-footed as a chamois and as steady as an Alpine guide. This it was which lent her cheek its rose. Altogether, a lovely and dainty maiden; a girl on whom eyes were already bent full of admiration and hope; but not yet spoiled, though she had been out ever since the last Queen's birthday ball. Her face and her gestures were full of vivacity, because her mother was a French woman; her eyes were full of truth and loyalty because her father was an English gentleman; at every turn of her head, at every quick movement of her hand, one was reminded of her descent, because this was French and that was English, and this she caught from her mother and that she inherited from her father.

As for the young man called Tom, he was dressed as only Colonials dare to dress. That is to say, he wore a flannel shirt without any collar and *all* rags, and a pair of flannel trousers, patched and darned in various places, yet almost as ragged as the shirt; round his waist was tied a belt made of long red silk; he had on a short coat or jacket of common blue cotton, something like that affected by the British butcher: it is strong, durable, and light, therefore it is greatly in fashion among the people of Palmiste, although it does wear white at the seams: for head-covering he wore an old helmet well battered and bruised. This was his morning dress, the things in which

he rode about the fields, looking after weeds and all the evils which assail the sugar-cane. He was his father's manager, and he took this journey every morning, starting at daybreak and returning about ten. He was a well set up youth, not so broad in the shoulder as many Englishmen, with brown hair cropped close, and a small beard and moustache; not a face betokening great intellect, nor had his shoulders the studious stoop; nor was he shortsighted; nor did he concern himself at all about literature or art, or the popular scientific chatter, or the current topics of the day. In fact, very few young men had read fewer books than Tom Kemyss. Yet he was not a fool: he studied machinery so as to understand the engines and works of his mill; he studied agricultural chemistry for practical purposes; he was handy in the carpenter's shop; he was good at all kinds of sports, was cunning of fence, a good shot, and as plucky a lad as ever stepped. And though he had never left his native island, and was seldom absent from his father's estate, he was not at all a rustical person, not a mere *hobereau*, nor a boor. Quite the contrary: his manners and carriage were as good as if he had been brought up in a London square and at Eton and Oxford. And he had been trained by his father in the old-fashioned ideas—which they say, those who know, are rapidly dying out—as to the

courtesy, respect, honour and service due to women.

When he had finished his pine-apple he strode away, and Virginie heard him whistling to his dogs, and then there was a mighty trampling of hoofs, because the daily struggle then began between Tom and his horse. The generous steed, being of high mind and proud of his descent, resolved every morning that this should be the last of obedience, and so attempted to bring about a revolution. When the attempt was quelled he galloped away obedient again.

Virginie poured out another cup of tea more carefully than the rest, placed it on a tray, and carried it away with her own hands. It was her mother's tea, and the girl had done this small service ever since she could carry anything.

When she was gone the chokra was left alone. At least, he thought he was alone. Unluckily, he forgot Suzette, and acted as any solitary boy might be expected to act.

He looked about him for a moment. The sugar-basin was filled with the delightful crystal sugar, as sweet as sugar candy, and as sparkling as so many diamonds. It was made in the mill of Mon Désir, and is the best sugar in the world, a great deal better than the white lumps of which we are so proud. The boy knew this fact, and it made his fingers to curl and his brown eyes to glow.

He had never learned the Church Catechism, this poor child; otherwise, no doubt——

Pring! Prang! Crick! Crack! Four, if you please: two on each ear, so that the report was heard a mile off, and every chokra on the estate jumped clean out of his jacket—because he had no shoes to jump out of—in terror and sympathy.

'Hein! Ha! Thou wilt steal, then, good-for-nothing? Take that—and that—little pig of Malabar!'

The boy fled to the kitchen, where he was received with the jeers of those who had not been recently detected.

And the old woman sat down on the steps again, in the sun, and laughed with her eyes, her lips, her teeth, her head, her hands, her portly person, and her feet. She brimmed over and she shook with laughter.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE SQUIRE.

Among the many questions which may be put by fools for the discomfiture of those who pretend to be wise, is the question how it is that men can be found to put their money into a sugar estate.

For the dangers and risks are great; the work is hard; the climate is generally trying; and the ultimate results are wrapped in a delightful cloud of uncertainty. As for the capital required at the outset, that is so great that it would maintain a whole family in England. On the mere interest of it they might take a house at Kensington, and give dinner parties, and go every year to the seaside. As for the thing to be grown—the cane—it is surrounded on all sides by innumerable enemies, like everything else which is carefully planted, tended, cockered up, and rendered effeminate. Sometimes it is an insect, which comes from no one knows where, and has no other object in life than just to bore holes right through the cane, and so to destroy it;

or it is a worm that appears suddenly in the ground, and refuses to eat anything except root of sugar-cane, and no one knows where *he* comes from either; or it is a kind of rot; or it is a wasting away and a drying up of the sweet juices; or it is some other of the many thousand diseases which affect vegetable life. Sometimes, also, it is a troop of monkeys, who get into the fields by night, and tear up the canes for very wanton mischief. Above all, there are the hurricanes, which lay the canes prostrate, tear them up by the roots, and wash them out of the ground; and they may come any year or every year. So that, unless fortune is more than commonly kind, the end of every planter who has not so large a capital that he can stand up against two three, or even four bad years in succession is the same—monotonously the same. That end is, in fact, smash; and his estate is sold. And then, because hope goes on springing in that elastic and everlasting way of which we know, there is never wanting a purchaser with a little money to throw away, and the old game begins again, with chinking of glasses and the sparkle of champagne, and the best wishes of friends, and the confidence of the young beginner.

That, however, is only the fate of the small capitalist. If you have got plenty of money to begin with, and want to multiply it by ten, and

can afford to wait, and like tropical life and exile, with the things which some weak-kneed brethren call discomforts, such as hot days, and vertical suns, and mosquitoes, and prickly heat, and insipid beef and tasteless mutton, you can do nothing better than take a sugar estate and manage it yourself. Some day people in England will find out how profitable a thing it is, so long as you need not borrow money to go on with. Then there will be companies started. Owners will sell to promoters for four times the value of the estate: that will be good for the owners, who will come to Paris, or London, or Monte Carlo, and have a fling so long as the money lasts: the promoters will sell the estates to the shareholders for ten times their value: this will be good for the promoters, who will make money by one swindle, to lose it in the next: then the companies will issue shares, publish prospectuses, and exhibit their sugar in grocers' shops; and they will appoint managers of local experience. These managers will be so experienced that they will sell the sugar, receive the money for the coolies, put everything in their own pockets, and bolt, working their way round by New Caledonia and Tahiti to San Francisco, and from there to New Orleans, enjoying the roses and rapture of gambling saloons, bars, and billiard-rooms. The company will then 'bust up,' and the estate will

be sold for half its real value to a local person, with no money but what he borrows from the bank, and all will go on as before, and, if we are all happy, let us not sit down to ask what odds.

The proprietor of Mon Désir, Captain Kemyss, commonly called the Squire by his English friends, became a planter through falling in love. It was in this way.

About five-and-twenty years ago, when people in Palmiste were beginning to think that they might try to forget the calamity of their great and terrible cholera year and to leave off telling each other horrible stories, there arrived in the island an extremely sprightly regiment, the officers in which were nearly all young, rich, and disposed to make things cheerful for themselves and all their friends, so far as lies in the power of the English officer. They manifested this disposition from the day of landing; they received callers with effusion; they called upon everybody, bought horses, dog-carts, buggies, pony-traps, American traps, drove about the country, accepted invitations to all the planters' houses, turned up uninvited to the Sunday morning breakfasts, held magnificent guest nights, allowed their band to play as often as they were asked, and gave balls the like of which had never before been heard of. Also, they offered prizes and cups at the races, and rode to win them; and they had

an eleven, and for the first year or so they played the national game with vigour: they were always pleased to see everybody in barracks at all hours and at all meals; brandy and soda was continually being produced: they exhibited and kept up, to the admiration of philosophers, a real Charles Lever-like air of solid, substantial enjoyment of life, as if there were no headaches, as if youth would always last, as if there was nothing in the world to care for beyond sport—in moderation; cricket, billiards, and racquets—always in moderation; parade and drill—in strict moderation; gambling—in tolerable moderation; feasting, drinking, and love-making without stint or stay, moderation, or any restraints beyond those imposed by physical consideration, such as the dimensions of the waist or the absence of the opposite sex. The colonel looked young, being about forty-eight, but he was tough—besides, the resources of science were called in to maintain the dark glossiness of his hair and moustache; the majors also looked young, being about six-and-thirty; the captains were in the early thirties and the late twenties; the subs. were all under five-and-twenty. It was a thirsty, toss-pot regiment; a rattling, rollicking, story-telling, song-singing, card-playing, racing, billiard-playing, betting, gambling, drinking, sit-up-late regiment; a handsome, flirting, dancing, mean-nothing, detrimental

regiment; a regiment, in short, which turned the heads of all the girls with flattery and compliments and dances, and all the things that youth most loves. In this regiment there were a couple of young men—that is, comparatively young, for they had both already got their company—who were close friends, and not, like their companions, wholly given over to sport and amusement; they had, in fact, the unusual good sense to perceive that life cannot be all champagne and skittles. Wherefore they sometimes went to bed early, did not take soda and brandy as a pick-me-up before breakfast, observed a liberal moderation in strong drink during the day, and did not look upon all pretty girls as made solely for the amusement of the man with the scarlet jacket. In fact, they were the small minority which among every madcap crew are always found to spoil sport by squaretoed temperance. In any other company they would have been considered as rather dashing young fellows; in this, the comparative soberness of their manners and morals was felt to be a standing reproach to their brother-officers. It is a safe rule that one must not be more virtuous than one's fellows. Therefore the regiment heard with great relief and thankfulness that not only were these two engaged to be married to girls of the island, but that they were going to sell out at once.

They became, in fact, engaged to two cousins, girls of French descent, who had been brought up together and were to each other as two sisters. They were alike in appearance, in tastes, and in accomplishments; they resembled each other in agreeing to be very much in love each with her own English wooer; they were both young, both beautiful, and both amiable. They differed, however, in one small point, felt by both young ladies to be of no. importance whatever; namely, that one was rich and the other poor. Captain Ferrier, the grandson of a peer, who married the rich girl, was himself already tolerably well provided; Captain Kemyss, the son of a bishop, who had only a moderate patrimony, married the one who was poor. Now, if he had stayed in the Army, or had gone home and lived quietly upon his modest income, he would have got along very well. But when he found that Ferrier intended to remain in Palmiste and cultivate his wife's sugar estate; when he learned, further, that his own wife would like nothing in the world so well as to remain all her days in the place where she was born; when he considered the fertility and goodness of the land; when the pleasures of a planter's life were pointed out to him, with the chances of a great fortune, he yielded to temptation and bought an estate. Observe the difference at the outset between the two friends.

Captain Ferrier married a girl who was the only child of a planter with the largest and most fertile estate in the island; with his own money and with the money already made out of the estate he would be enabled, whatever happened, to ride out the storm. Therefore, with ordinary care, his prosperity was assured. Captain Kemyss, on the other hand, invested the whole of his own very moderate fortune in purchasing an estate. To complete the purchase he had, like most of his brother-planters, to borrow of the bank a third of the purchase-money at nine per cent. He therefore became, for life, a man encumbered with a hopeless debt. One son was born to him, Tom by name, now his manager, partner, and overseer. His friend Ferrier had several children, but all died except one, a girl—Virginie. When Ferrier died himself, during the great fever year of 1867, Captain Kemyss became the guardian of the child and the executor of the will. Madame Ferrier and her daughter came to live with him, and they formed, Creole fashion, one household.

There are some men to whom the backwoods or colonial life, far from friends, seems to strengthen and deepen their old ideas about the most desirable manner of life. Captain Kemyss—the 'Squire'—carried on in the quiet Palmiste bungalow the kind of life to which he had been himself

brought up. He was on his tropical estate an English country gentleman ; he educated his son in his own ideas ; it was through him that Tom showed no rusticity, and Virginie no Creole insularity. He was now a man of sixty ; tall, grey-headed, with a grey moustache ; he had a military bearing still ; he was a member of the Legislative Council, and was, therefore, the Honourable Captain Kemyss, and in the whole colony there was no one who bore so good a name, or was held in such great honour, or was more regarded for integrity and trustworthiness in all his doings as he.

His life would have been perfectly happy, but for a certain grim spectre, which would not be confined in a cupboard, but kept marching about with him wherever he went ; stood behind him at dinner ; sat on his bed at night, and never left him. It was the lean and gaunt ghost of bankruptcy. He first raised this ghost by much calculation and sad foreboding in the hurricane year of 1868 ; two or three good years laid it in the Red Sea ; then bad years followed, and up it sprang again, vivacious and sprightly as Jack-in-the-Box, and more horrible to look at. After that it was never laid again, but came every year nearer to him, looked larger, and shook a more threatening finger. Some men are so thick-skinned that, although they see the danger afar

off, and know that they will shipwreck upon it, yet they go about their business in perfect happiness, regardless of the certain future. The Squire, who was as courageous as most men, trembled and shook with shame and terror when he thought of the word bankruptcy. The year 1880 was, for the estate of Mon Désir a bad year; the yield was poor; it seemed as if the soil was, perhaps, giving out; prices were not high; the crop was short; the bank was beginning an ominous note of warning. Still, if 1881 was good; if there were no hurricanes and prices improved, the estate would pull through somehow, as it had pulled through so many years before, by being able to meet the interest of the debt; if not, if anything at all of the many things which might happen went against him, then, then—the blow could no longer be staved off—he must go to the wall. The prospect, to a man turned sixty, of seeing the whole of his life's work destroyed and brought to nought, was a very terrible thing to consider.

There was one way out of the difficulty; one certain way; yet it was a way which he would not suffer himself to dwell upon. How if Tom were to marry Virginie? For then there could be no more troubles about money. The two estates—hers, large and prosperous; his, small and struggling—adjoined. They could be worked

with the same mill and machinery. Tom could manage both. No one knew better than himself, the trusty executor and guardian of the child, how, year after year, good and bad together, her estate brought in a clear income of eight thousand pounds at least; and how this money had been accumulating and piling up during Virginie's minority, until it was now, for a land of small capitalists, an enormous fortune. But to consider the girl, almost his own daughter, as the means of rescuing himself from difficulties was a dreadful thing to him.

Meantime, there were two persons who were as desirous of seeing this result as Captain Kemyss, with the advantage over him, that they did not conceal their wishes.

'Sybille,' Madame Kemyss would whisper when she saw the young people together.

'Lucie,' Madame Ferrier would reply, pressing her friend's hand, silently.

The cousins who were so much alike in youth had grown alike again in middle life. This is a trying time with most women: they have lost the later beauty of womanhood, and have not yet put on that of age. These two ladies, however, were still beautiful, in the soft and graceful Creole way; only they looked older than they were, which, perhaps, helped them. They were past forty; and they looked, somehow, though their hair was

neither thin nor grey, nor were their faces crows-footed, as if they were past fifty.

'In France,' one would say to the other, 'we should have settled it ourselves by this time.'

'In England,' the other would reply, 'the boy would have settled it with the girl before this time.'

'Tom is a good boy, Sybille. Perhaps he fears your possible displeasure.'

'He is a very good boy, Lucie. That is why I wish he would tell Virginie that he would like her to be his wife.'

The only reason why Tom did not tell her this most undoubted truth was that he was a Creole. Now all Creoles are perfectly happy with the present condition of things, provided that ensures a sufficiency of curry and claret and a roof. It is a land of sweet contentment. Tom was profoundly in love; but then he had been in love with Virginie ever since she was born; there was nothing new in that. It was impossible for him to think of life without her. On the other hand, things were so pleasant as they were, that it never occurred to him to desire a change. They tell a story in Palmiste of two Creoles who once lived there: they were devotedly attached to each other; they went on year after year enjoying a protracted spring time of love; their parents died; they still continued their gentle

courtship; the years passed on; they became grey and bald; still they met day by day, and had their little lovers' quarrels and the fond renewings of love, quite in the Horatian style; when one was seventy and the other sixty-eight—though, to be sure, they still felt like twenty and eighteen—a friend suggested that it might be almost time to complete the long engagement by a wedding. They considered for a few months; they thought the suggestion reasonable; they were married; but they had so long been lovers that they could not bear to give up their old habits, and they presently separated with mutual consent, went back each to his own house, and 'carried on' as before.

As regards Virginie herself, she was young; she had never considered or thought of the question at all. She was undoubtedly very fond of Tom; it seemed as if life without Tom would be impossible. But, as yet she was innocent of any thought of love, just as she was wholly and entirely ignorant of the world, of humanity, of evil, wrong-doing, treachery, and deception. To be sure, the coolies were always in trouble, always suffering or inflicting wrong; always deceiving, cheating, thieving, and quarrelling. Only, what coolies do, regarded as part of humanity's statistics, is only interesting to those who are able to take a broad and catholic view of mankind, there-

fore not interesting to those who live among them. In other words, the white residents in Palmiste disclaim the brotherhood of the coloured man. It is difficult to understand the ignorance of such a girl so brought up. She had not only never left the island, but had never slept off the estate, except once, when she went to a Government House ball, and once when she went to a garrison ball, six months before this time. She had been educated by her mother and Madame Kemyss; her guardian took a share in the teaching, too; the only friend of her own age was Tom; he was her companion and confidant. She knew nothing of society, except as she saw it at home when people came to stay. There was no art whatever within her reach, except music, which her mother taught her; there was no church even within reach, and the Sunday was only marked by the reading of part of the English prayer-book; there was no talk of literature, because her guardian had but few books, and she had read them over and over again; there were no politics. As regards European events, they are treated on these estates with about as much concern as if they were the events recorded in Gibbon. There were wars and defeats, and many thousands slain; treaties made became treaties broken; the victor was flushed with conquest, and the enemy rolled sullenly over the frontier. Historians never

alter their sweet flowing style, because the events of history are always the same. To the dwellers in this far-off land the events of the present are no more real than the events of the past; to Virginie, as she heard them summed up when each mail came in, they were shadows and unmeaning things. The realities of life were the morning and evening rambles, the flowers, the water-falls, the hills, the fruits, and Tom.

## CHAPTER III.

### IN THE BACHELORS' PAVILION.

In the pavilion the lazy bachelors began, one after the other, to stir, sit up, curse the mosquitoes, and finally to get up and come forth, clothed, for the most part, in ragged flannels and rough tweeds which had known service and were stained and torn. There was great diversity as regards hats; for some had broad Panama hats, with brims like the spreading amplitude of a family umbrella; and some had the ordinary round hat of the period, generously endowed with flowing puggrey; and some had solar helmets; and one, which was the Padre, wore the ecclesiastical broad-brimmed felt which we all know and love so much. He also wore the long flapping coat which, with the broad felt hat, makes our ecclesiastics almost as graceful to look upon as their brothers of Spain. One only among them appeared as if he was dressed for a battue in an English preserve, perfectly turned out in garments which made one or two of the younger

men ashamed of their rags. This was the Honourable Guy Talbot Ferrier, Virginie's second cousin, only son and heir of Lord Ferrier, and a captain in the line regiment now on garrison duty at Palmiste.

Most of the party knew each other as only colonials can know each other—that is with a perfect knowledge of all the strong points, weak points, good qualities, bad qualities, virtues and vices which distinguish their brethren. Not the least use for any of them to pretend to sail under false colours, or to put on side of any kind. Of course they did it, but it was no use doing it. Among them was Sandy McAndrew, of the great Scotch firm of McMull, McAndrew, and Company. The only fault of Sandy, regarded as a man and a companion, was that he generally fell asleep during dinner. In other respects he was perfect. Then, there was Davy McLoughlin, his partner, remarkable for the fact that his legs after dinner had a tendency to tie themselves into knots, which is an embarrassing thing to witness until you get used to it. There was also the Pink Boy, who was only nineteen, and had but just arrived, and as yet had not had time to display his many admirable qualities. But he was good at laughing; and he was as handsome as Apollo; and he blushed, which, I believe, that god never did. His tweeds were almost as good as those of

Captain Ferrier, but they were in different style, because the Boy was not a noble sportsman at all but an accountant in a bank. And there was the Assistant Colonial Secretary, a person of very great importance in the official world; in private, a great retailer of good things, with a prodigious memory; so that, once started, he would go on with stories new and old for a livelong day, and very often did. He knew every man, woman, and child in the colony, and had an excellent story to tell about each; a cheerful, even a jovial companion; and he was of the persuasion which allows a curly crisp brown beard to remain upon the chin as a complement to the curly crisp brown hair.

There was also Major Morgan, who came with Captain Ferrier. He was a soldier by profession; but his principal occupation was the playing of cards, which was the reason why he was so frequently the companion of the younger man. Though he was entirely addicted at cards, and found in the changes and chances of the pips the only joy in life, and though he played to win, he was not a gambler. It will never be said of the Major that he was in difficulties by reason of his losses at cards; rather, it may be safely prophesied of him, that in the immediate future, when he has retired from the service, he will begin a long and tranquil career as a morning, afternoon, and even-

ing whist player at his club. But at present he is still young enough to play any game that offers, whether écarté, loo, lansquenet, baccarat, bézique, cribbage, whist, poker, euchre, all-fours, monty, picquet, sechs-und-sechzig, or nap. A cheerful man, who generally won, and therefore regarded the world as a place where justice is accorded to merit.

The Professor—his name was Percival—who had been a resident in the island for four or five years, was always to be found at Mon Désir at the *bonne année*. Perhaps, when he arrived, he had entertained hopes of introducing energy and activity of mind and body into the lazy colony. All such hopes, if any existed, were now gone; he dreamed no more of fostering a love for culture, being quite persuaded that things would go on their old way whatever he said or did. This is, after all, a philosophic line to take; even in quite temperate zones it requires an amazing amount of talk, persuasion, entreaty, tears, expostulation, kicks, shoves, cuffs, boxes on the ear, admonitions of stick, to move the people a small six inches; in tropical countries it wants ten times the energy to produce a far more miserable result, and fever is the almost certain consequence. Therefore, the Professor sat down, and said that uncultured man was probably as happy as he of the æsthetic crowd; and that, for

his own part, he should cultivate his garden—which words, like those of Candide, were an allegory. He found himself much happier when he had ceased to make himself unhappy about the downward tendencies, swinishness, and grovelling of the islanders. He was cheerful again; he recovered his spirits; began again to tell stories, and regarded life as an optimist. In person he was shorter than most; he made up for that by being broader than most; he wore a big brown beard and spectacles; he had a catholic taste for wine of all kinds, if only it was good, and was almost a Frenchman in his admiration of all pretty women.

There was one other guest whom one should notice among all the rest. It was the Padre.

He was young, quite young, and enthusiastic. When he left Oxford to be ordained a Bishop's Chaplain for Palmiste, he thought he was coming to a place which was crying aloud for the guidance of the Church. He dreamed of an obedient and docile flock, patiently awaiting instruction. He would instruct them; he would guide them—to be sure, he had only, with great difficulty, secured a humble third in Moderations—he would lead them. And to ecclesiasticism of the Keble College kind he would add, by degrees, æsthetics, athletics, art, and culture. There was not as yet, in the whole island, one single piece of blue china,

nor a peacock's feather, nor a picture of the latest school, nor a *ballade* of the prig-poets, nor any old silver, or lace, nor ritual, nor vestments, or incense—all were downright sturdy independent Protestants, Scotch Presbyterians, and so forth. So that a deep depression fell upon the young man's soul. He was so young, too, that he could not bear to see things going on without joining in them; and so sensitive that he felt the ridicule of his own long skirts; and so sharp that he saw how his profession was more respected than beloved, and that his presence was too often a *gêne*. Then he was too sincere not to be grieved by the thirstiness of his companions, their random talk, their 'wild words,' their readiness to play cards, and their eagerness to laugh at a good story. He tried to tell a few good stories himself, but perceived with pain that he did not succeed in making his hearers laugh. A tall, thin young man, with the narrow, high forehead and straight features often found in enthusiastic young clergymen; one of the kind who affect great thirst for knowledge with the air of having known it all beforehand; who have an exasperating way of saying 'Yes, yes, yes,' to whatever is said; and a man perfectly sincere, perfectly virtuous, honourable. and religious, whose life is bound to be a failure because he understandeth not his fellow-man.

As they came out upon the verandah of the Pavilion, one by one, they began to disperse. The Assistant Colonial Secretary observing the remarkable neatness of the Padre's dress, the length of his skirts and the glossiness of his trousers, proposed to take him for a pleasant walk among the hills; they set off together. Those who saw them start reported an ominous twinkle in the Secretary's eyes, and a courtesy in his demeanour, not always remarkable in his treatment of the cloth. When they returned, about nine o'clock, the Padre's long coat in ribbons, and his glossy trousers held together by pins and bits of string, they remembered that twinkle, though the Secretary now takes blame to himself, and says that he ought to have taken thought of the Chinese raspberries and other thorny underwoods on that hillside. He may be very sorry, but his impersonation of the Padre in a thorny thicket caught by the skirts is funny, and has been known to make even the Bishop laugh. As for the Professor, he went into the garden and cut a pine-apple, and found a shady place to eat it in. Then he returned to the Pavilion and threw himself into the hammock, there to read a French novel, which the Pink Boy thought was a learned treatise, and therefore would not interrupt. Sandy McAndrew took a gun and went to take pot shots at the bo's'n birds in the ravine. His partner,

with an eye to business, borrowed an umbrella and went to inspect the canes. And the Pink Boy, left alone because no one invited him to join their party, ventured timidly to the verandah of the house in hopes of finding Miss Ferrier alone and getting a talk. She was not there; but the squire was, and they went out for a walk together, which was not quite the same thing.

The Honourable Guy Talbot Ferrier, born, as Debrett tells everybody, in the year 1853, was therefore on New-Year's Day, 1881, in his twenty-eighth year. He was, at first sight, a singularly handsome young man, whose features were regular, figure tall and upright, and eyes of a soft dark blue. His voice was musical and full, and his hands were small. He would have formed, in fact, an excellent model for a sculptor, and, by simply changing his expression—nothing more—a most beautiful and poetical portrait might have been made of him. It was, however, just his expression which spoiled him. He had got, somehow, the wrong one, and so an incongruous and uncomfortable effect was produced. There are a great many young men like him in this respect. Nature intended them for one expression, and they have gone astray, and so got another which does not fit. Later on in life it does not matter; because the manner of life

which gives the expression also changes the features. Now, in the case of this young gentleman, the nobility of purpose, the resolution of virtue, the courage of principle which should have appeared naturally on his face were not there.

Virtuous resolution and high moral principle are not always necessary qualifications for making a young man popular. There were many men much beloved in Ferrier's regiment who were not implacably virtuous; yet Ferrier himself was a man with no friends; he was perfectly well bred; he was not generally insolent, he was not boisterous, or loud, or contemptuous, or superior, or any of the things which generally make men unpopular. Yet he was not liked. Many reasons might be assigned to explain this fact: one will be quite sufficient—the young man not only thought of no one but himself, but did not pretend, as many quite selfish men do, to think about anybody. He was thoroughly held and possessed by the love of self. He had but one god—the soul within him which continually craved for something new, something which it could devour, something which would keep it in excitement. Now the man who desires not before all other things, but to the exclusion of all other things his own personal gratification, is always in the long run, if it comes in his way, mainly attracted by gambling. There

is a fierce excitement in it; there is the rapid acquisition of money—the possession of which means venal pleasure of all kinds; there is the trampling on other people in order to get it; there are the alternations of fear and hope; no one else is benefited by your success; no one else desires it; every man is wholly for himself; there is but one prize, and all desire it; to make one man happy, the rest must be disappointed. Therefore, though there are many pursuits in which the egoist may gratify his favourite passion, there is none so entirely absorbing and so satisfying as gambling.

A man at eight-and-twenty ought, even in colonial garrison life, to have some other pursuits. Ferrier found none which gave him any pleasure. He played continually: he would have played all day; he was ready to play all night. The pleasing result, so far, was a quagmire of debts and obligations out of which the way would have been dubious even to a rich man. Now the house of Ferrier had never been rich. Lord Ferrier was not rich as a country gentleman; as a peer he was certainly poor. And at all times there was present to his heir the vision of those debts and the anxiety how they were to be paid.

This morning he awoke raspy in his temper, as often happens when men sit up till two in the morning to play écarté and drink too much soda-

and-brandy. And, he remembered that the Major had taken another I O U from him when they parted. And, in addition, he found that his groom had let down his horse and cut his knees. It was small satisfaction, yet some relief, to kick and cuff the fellow; and when this was done there was still the recollection of that I O U.

'A bad night, Ferrier,' said the Major, looking at the little slip of paper in his pocket-book. 'This makes thirteen hundred and fifty-five, I think.'

Ferrier received the hint in silence.

'If I were you, my boy,' continued the Major, 'I would drop play for a while, just to let luck come round a bit.'

'Luck!' the loser groaned. 'There never was such luck as mine.'

'I don't think, Ferrier, that I ought to play with you; it isn't fair. I keep my head; you lose yours. I'm an old hand, and you are a young one. I play for the game; you play for the stakes.'

'Hang it, man! You can't mean that you don't play to win?'

'Of course I play to win. Every man does. But I think of the game, and you think only of the points. See?'

Ferrier threw himself into one of the long chairs and relapsed into a gloomy silence. The

New Year had begun badly, indeed, for him. It was going to finish—but this, as yet, he knew not —worse. The Major strolled out with an umbrella, and then there were left on the verandah only the Professor and Ferrier. Presently the Professor dropped his French novel, and, lazily swinging in the hammock, contemplated the moody young gentleman with wonder and pity.

'It seems to me,' he said to himself after a while, 'that here is a young man whose conscience is pegging away at him like the eagle at the man on the rock. I wonder what he has done. To think that Virginie should have a cousin with such a face.'

Indeed, at the moment the face was suffused with such a glow of vindictive wrath, self-reproach, and hatred, that it was quite horrible and terrifying to look upon.

'I wonder who it is, and what he has done: though, perhaps, it is a person of the other sex,' said the Professor. 'But it may be, perchance, that the Honourable Guy is possessed of a devil or two.'

Towards nine o'clock, the sun being high and the heat of the day fairly begun, the men began to come back, and when the Secretary appeared leading the discomfited Padre, with his beautiful skirts cut into ribbons like a banana-leaf after a hurricane, and his black trousers rent in a hundred

places, there arose a shout of admiration and joy quite beautiful to hear. And then they all went to bathe.

Tom, who was the last to return, having been the round of the whole estate and made notes of shortcomings, led the way. He knew the pool where water was coolest; it was half a mile off, where the ravine was the deepest and the narrowest. And he knew the shortest way to it, which was straight down a perpendicular rock about ninety feet deep; but, as he went down there every morning, it never occurred to him that anybody should think of breaking his neck there, and he was greatly surprised when half-way down to see above him the Padre clinging to the rock like a spread-eagle, unable to move up or down. Presently, the united efforts of the party got him up, and the Professor undertook to lead him to the pool by a safer and more circuitous route.

Oh! the pools and lashers, and waterfalls and brawling mountain-streams of Palmiste! Oh! to sit under a little cascade of four or five feet high, to let the cold water flow over the hot and weary limbs, is a joy which we who shiver in cold latitudes cannot understand or even conceive. It belongs almost to the keen and passionate joys; it is one which never palls, of which one is never satiated, the desire for which recurs every morn-

ing. 'But,' said the Professor, 'I prefer the long way round.'.

The bath and the walk home, and the dressing which followed, brought them well on to eleven, which, as everybody knows, is the breakfast hour of the Palmiste planter. Eleven o'clock in the forenoon is, in fact, the proper time, the natural time, for eating. We foolish folk of England have abolished breakfast and substituted luncheon, a meal which spoils the day, depraves the appetite, and ruins the dinner. Nature intended mankind to eat twice in the day, and each time after the fatigue of labour. At eleven, if one gets up at five or thereabouts, the day's work is well-nigh done. After six hours in the saddle among the canes, for instance, which Tom had, one gets home with a hunger almost unintelligible in these climes; a hunger which to a London alderman would make life indeed worth having. With what a cordial will that breakfast was attacked by the guests; how claret flowed without stint or stay down thirsty throats; how, after the simple bourgeois plenty of *bouillabaisse*, fish fried, fish boiled, chicken and salad, cutlets, grilled turkey, and devilled bones, a stately prawn curry added nobility to the repast; how coffee was followed by a *chasse;* how Tom distinguished himself beyond and above his peers; how the Pink Boy contemplated the thing with rapturous won-

der; and how the Padre thought with something like shame of the plain English rasher and the cup of tea,—these are things which may be briefly indicated, not dwelt upon. Envy is a hateful passion, and one must always consider the weaker brethren.

After breakfast there was a rest. Most of them went back to the Pavilion for cigars. The Padre, fatigued with the morning's scramble, and perhaps just touched with the unaccustomed wine, fell fast asleep. Only Captain Ferrier remained with the ladies. He had shaken off his moody fit, and was now, having taken a great deal of claret, thoroughly set up and revived. Virginie had a great many questions to ask, and the two ladies sat and listened in their soft and dreamy manner. They talked about England; and the child wanted to know all about her cousins and the noble head of the house; what the castle was like; what they all did when they were at home in it; what the place was like, and what the people. Her cousin tried to describe them all. But what can a girl understand who knows no winter, no fog, no snow, no east winds, no green enclosures, no English villages, and no old English churches standing amid the graves of all the generations, girt with the old trees?

Meantime Tom, who knew not the meaning of fatigue, though he had been six hours in the

saddle, and had eaten a more enormous breakfast than any of the rest, was busied with what appeared to be a net. At sight of that net the Professor arose, and softly retired to hide himself in the tool-house with his novel. Tom unrolled his net, examined the meshes, mended one or two places, then rolled it up again. This took half an hour or so. Then he called a boy, and gave it him with a few directions. Then he rubbed his hands, and announced, with a cheerful smile, that everything was ready, and they could start as soon as they pleased.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE HUNTING OF THE GOURAMI.

'Let us first,' said the Secretary, the only one who had been taking any part in the preparations, 'wake up the Padre. He, too, must go with us.'

He was awakened with some difficulty, and at first exhibited temper, and refused to join the expedition. However, he was young, and not to go might seem like showing a white feather unworthy of an Oxford athlete. Besides, the sport was the gentle and harmless one of angling. Therefore the poor innocent, though with misgiving, put on his broad felt hat and once more adjusted his white muslin puggrey and was ready.

When the Professor had been led forth by the ear from his hiding-place and had been told that he, too, must go, and that resistance would be unavailing, the party was complete, the only man left behind being Ferrier, who had no taste for sport of any kind outside an English preserve. He suggested that the Major should stay behind with him and while away the heat of the day

with a little écarté, or vingt-un for two—a very pleasing method of losing money. But the Major refused, and went off with the rest.

First marched Tom, important, because he was the leader or captain of the *chasse aux gouramis*. Next came the Indian boys, carrying the gear; then followed, with a rueful countenance, the captive Professor, grimly remembering fatigues on a certain occasion a year ago, and devoutly wishing that the sport was over; after him the Padre, the long skirts of his only clerical coat left him flapping about his legs, and his white puggrey streaming behind the broad black hat; and then the Assistant Colonial Secretary, with a sweet smile upon him as he contemplated that broad hat and those flapping skirts, and thought of what awaited the owner of those garments. It was the hottest time in the year; in the shade the thermometer would be about ninety; in the sun, anything you please. Yet there was a gentle breeze or stir in the air from the south, whence cometh the breath of the Antarctic, warmed upon its way, yet cool still, and fresh, when it floats across the hot and tropical twenties.

'In the ravine,' said the Professor, in order to encourage the Padre, 'there will be no breeze at all; the rocks catch the heat and hold it till strangers come; then they give it out, and the stranger is as grateful as you will be presently.

It will be like the hot room in the Turkish bath —that room, I mean, where, if you want breakfast, you take the materials in raw and hold them in your hand till they are cooked. Last year we brought some tiffin with us—eggs, you know, and bread, and some slices of ham; we put them on a stone just for a few minutes while we went into a pool after the gouramis. When we came back the eggs were hard boiled, the bread was toast, and the rashers of bacon were done to a turn.'

'I wish,' said the Padre, 'that I had left my waistcoat at home.'

'If you had been well advised,' said the Professor, whose only fault was a want of reverence for sacred things, 'you would have come on this expedition in your surplice, and nothing else.'

Presently they came to the break-neck way down the cliff, down which they all scrambled except these two, and they went ignominiously round by a longer and safer way. 'What boots it,' asked the Professor, 'to save ten minutes if you break your neck?'

When they joined the party, the Padre observed, with surprise, that they were all undressing. Further, that the Professor, with a sigh, also began to shed his garments, and that he himself was expected to do the same thing. He realised the meaning of the irreverent suggestion about his surplice when he received a little

maillot of coloured cotton, such as Frenchmen use to swim in. And he began almost to wish that he had not joined the expedition. In a few minutes the whole party were arrayed in this primitive dress, in which and their helmets and hats, and nothing else, they began walking along the hot boulders, under and among which the stream was brawling on her way.

The streams of Palmiste are all alike: they rise in the hills and they run into the sea, through ravines beneficently provided by Nature for the purpose. If there were no ravines they would have to tumble, in break-neck fashion, over precipices. As it is, they gracefully roll, run, leap, babble, roar, prattle, fall, hasten, or linger on their way, through most beautiful valleys, sometimes deep, sometimes shallow; sometimes broad, sometimes narrow; sometimes with perpendicular faces of rock, and sometimes with sloping sides, clothed with hanging wood. Sometimes the bottom of the ravine consists of great rounded boulders, and one has to get along by jumping from one to the other. At first, this is fatiguing, until you get into the swing of it. Sometimes there is a broad flat bottom, covered over and piled with boulders; sometimes the ravine closes quite in, and the stream runs noisily between the rocky walls of a narrow way; sometimes the water dashes over the stones, forming hundreds

of tiny cascades; sometimes it glides under them, and is invisible for half a mile or so, though the dense growth on either hand speaks of the water below; sometimes it widens out and forms lashers, pools, or basins; and sometimes it leaps over a cliff and becomes a waterfall, dazzling, feathery, like diamond spray. And everywhere, except on the face of the rock, trees: such trees as one may dream of; palms of every kind—the date palm, the cocoa, the raphia, the travellers' tree, the aloe with its long mast, the fragrant acacia, the tamarind, and a hundred others, whose names one knows not. In the shade under the trees and hidden behind the rocks are ferns, such as one may not hope to see in any other country, and on the branches of the trees are orchids for those who have eyes to see and knowledge to understand.

The ravine on that hot January day was very silent, winding in and out, growing deeper as it approached the sea. A few bo's'n birds called to each other flying across from rock to rock; you could hear, perhaps, the chatter of monkeys in the trees. But there was no other sound. The place is so far away from the steps of man that a visitor who should chance to slip and fall might lie there until he died, and long after, without being found. For many miles of its course no one ever goes there, except at rare intervals when

Tom brings his friends to fish for gourami, or when he strolls down in the afternoon with a gun on the chance of a shot. The coolies, an incurious folk, have no occasion to go there; the negroes are afraid of ghosts; and, of course, no one except an Englishman would venture into those hot and stifling depths at high noon of the New Year, with the sun straight over head glaring into all kinds of nooks and crannies where, save at such seasons of vertical advantage, ray of sun can never enter. The men were barefooted, and presently the Padre began to understand the Professor's allegory of the hard-boiled eggs. He was very hot in spite of his scanty apparel; he asked himself, with shame, what certain people at home, who thought greatly of his missionary zeal, would say if they saw him now; he was tired with the early morning walk; his feet were blistering; his legs ached with the perpetual leaping from stone to stone; his shins were bruised with frequent falls.

Said the Professor softly,

'Last year a man came here who was unaccustomed to walking on red-hot stones. We carried him up again after a while, but he has never recovered the use of his feet, and now goes on crutches.'

Then he was silent, and the Padre began to think there might be some truth in it.

But their leader called a halt, and everybody, while the preparations were being made, sat down with their feet in the water.

They were arrived at a most beautiful pool, about forty feet long and twenty broad. Great trees hung over the water, and splendid *lianes*, with stems as thick as the trunk of a good-sized English oak, spread out long arms, octopus fashion, to throttle and destroy the trees which they embraced. They began—those who understood the method—by lowering the net carefully into the water at the upper end. When all was ready the Professor, with a groan, took up his position in the middle, while Tom placed himself at one end and the Secretary at the other. These three were places of honour assigned to those who were most at ease in the water, and presently they were all swimming slowly down the pool, joined by the others. It was a sweet and a beautiful sight to see the spectacles of the Professor glittering under his helmet, as he went through the task, without enthusiasm, yet conscientiously; and the broad hat of his Reverence shading an anxious face, because he was not happy about his feet, and because the proceedings seemed to lack the dignity proper to the cloth; and the red face of the Major and the delight of the Pink Boy in the coolness of the water. Presently Tom handed

over his end of the net to the McAndrew and disappeared. After remaining under the water for about five-and-twenty minutes or so, during which time he was adjusting the net at the bottom, he came up again. At this point the Professor, catching sight of the Padre's nose just out of the water, under the shade of his beautiful broad hat, began to laugh silently, and communicated a shivering to the net, so that Tom thought it was one of the eels, in length from ten to forty feet, for which the rivers of Palmiste are so famous, and went down again to investigate.

By slow degrees and with great care the net was hauled along the whole pool and pulled in at the end. Then Tom's responsibilities began again. For he now had to dive down and bring up the fish, taking only as many as they wanted and picking out the big ones, throwing the young fish back again into the pool. Meantime, those who were not actively employed sat on the edge of the pool with their feet in the water and waited. It was a good haul; but Tom said that they must have one more cast of the net, and that the next likely pool was not more than a quarter of a mile down the stream. He set off, leading the way, as before. The rest followed meekly, with the exception of the Professor, who beckoned the Padre and made a gesture of silence.

When the procession had disappeared beyond

the next bend of the rocks, he rose and asked his Reverence if he wished to play that game any more.

'I—I—certainly think that we have had enough.'

'Then come back with me. We will put on our clothes and we will go cameron-fishing instead.'

'Have we not had enough fishing for one day?' The Padre thought of those awful stones and of his blistered feet, and remembered the cool verandah.

The Professor hastened to explain.

'We shall not take off our clothes for cameron-fishing; nor shall we jump about on red-hot boulders; and we shan't walk at all. It is a lazy sport. We shall sit under the shadiest place we can find, higher up, where there is a little air, I will teach you how to fish. I never catch any myself, but I know the way other people catch them; and perhaps you will be more lucky.'

'All this seems a dreadful waste of time, does it not?' asked the man fresh from Oxford.

'You have only been a month in Palmiste,' said the Professor. 'After a little, you will discover that you *can't* waste time here. There's no such thing as wasting time, unless, indeed, you

throw it away on reading. Out here we are irresponsible. Life goes by, I suppose, because there is a cemetery; but you don't feel as if it was ever going to end. There is no use trying to do any work. Nobody will ever be improved; nobody wants to be improved. It is warm and sunny—what more can a man want?'

'If I thought that,' said the Padre, 'I would go straight back to England and find Work. Why, it was because I thought I should find my Work here that I came.'

The Professor smiled. 'That is the language of the schools. I know it.'

'Would you have me,' asked the young clergyman hotly, 'would you have me take this post in order to sit down in shady places and catch—what do you call them?'

'Wise men sit down and meditate,' said the Professor. 'Talk to the Squire; he never reads much, yet he is as wise as Solomon. Restless men buzz about, and shove, and push, and call it work. Do you know the story in Rabelais about the work of Diogenes?'

'I do not read Rabelais,' said his Reverence, coldly.

'Poor man! Never mind. There was a civil chaplain here until lately who was a miracle of laziness. Yet he always went on talking about his Work, with a capital W, you know, just as

you do. It is very good to begin with, and the habit remains.'

'I hope the habit will remain.'

'It will. It will. But the thing will vanish. I am going home myself before long, because I am one of the restless men, and want to work. It is very foolish of me, and I am sure I ought rather to stay. Never mind. Let us go catch the cameron. Then we will find our way home and sit on the verandah till it is time to dress for dinner, and eat letchees and talk to Virginie. I have known her ever since I came here, which is now four years ago; and I am in love with her, as you will be before long—very likely you are already—you need not blush, because it does you credit—and I am deuced sorry she has got that fellow for a cousin.'

'Why?' asked the Padre.

'Why? Because—because I do not like him.'

They had their cameron-fishing. The Professor led the way to a quiet little stream above the ravine, where there was shade. Here he cut a long thin branch of a willow-like tree and tied to the end of it a running noose, made of the thin and strong tendril of the *liane*. 'Now,' he said, 'you do likewise. Go and sit on that stone, there, and I will sit there. All you have to do is to keep quiet. When you see a cameron march-

ing along, pit-a-pat, suspecting nothing, hook your noose over his tail. Then nip him up, and he is caught. It is quite easy to do it, though I have never been able, with all my efforts, to catch a single one.'

'What is a cameron like, when you do see him?'

'He is about six inches long, and he is black, and he looks like a crayfish, or big prawn. He is good enough to boil a beautiful red, and he lends himself to curry, or you can eat him boiled. He isn't proud. Now, go and catch him.'

The Professor was short-sighted, consequently he never saw any camerons at all. But he sat very patiently, with his noose in the water and the camerons playing about the harmless trap in dozens; and he meditated.

'She will be a great heiress'—this was the staple of his reflections—'that cousin of hers will be a Lord, very likely he will want to marry her; and she ought to marry Tom, because she loves him; next to Tom, and if I could make up my mind to murder Tom, she ought to marry me, because I love her. And her money would set the Captain's estate on its legs again. Poor old man! Half a hurricane this year and down he goes! . . . . . Hallo! Padre, old man, wake up. It's half-past five, and instead of

catching camerons you've gone to sleep again. I haven't caught any myself, but I've had some splendid misses. Let us go and talk to Virginie.'

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